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Evaluation of the National Parks Sustainable Development Fund

March 2004

Main Report

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Abbreviations

AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
BAP	Biodiversity Action Plan
CA	Countryside Agency
Defra	Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
JAC	Joint Advisory Committee
NP, Park	National Park
NPA	National Park Authority
RDA	Regional Development Agency
SDF	Sustainable Development Fund
SDO	Sustainable Development (Fund) Officer

Abbreviations used in tables and figures

BA	Norfolk and Suffolk Broads
DT	Dartmoor National Park
EX	Exmoor National Park
LD	Lake District National Park
NH	Northumberland National Park
NY	North York Moors National Park
PD	Peak District National Park
YD	Yorkshire Dales National Park

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Evaluation of the National Parks Sustainable Development Fund

(March 2004)

Main Report

1) Introduction.

The Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) is a new funding stream for English¹ National Park Authorities and the Broads Authority (henceforth collectively NPAs or 'Parks'), established to help them deliver their social and economic objectives. The statutory authority for the Fund is Section 72 of the Environment Act 1995.

SDF was announced in July 2002 by Alun Michael, Minister of State for Rural Affairs. The SDF Prospectus reflects Defra's objectives of sustainable development, partnership and social inclusion, and declares that it will

*"aid the achievement of National Park purposes by encouraging individuals, community groups and businesses to cooperate together to develop practical sustainable solutions to the management of their activities"*²

a) Objectives and criteria

The SDF Prospectus defines the aim of the Fund as to *"develop and test new ways of achieving a more sustainable way of living in the countryside"* by providing a flexible and non-bureaucratic means of funding projects which:

- explore ways of pursuing the principle of sustainability and of breaking down barriers to sustainability;
- develop models for the sustainable management of the countryside that could be applied more widely in England;
- generate greater awareness and understanding of sustainability;
- involve individuals, businesses, community groups and/or
- encourage participation of young people and
- promote social inclusion.

Each year's allocations have been divided equally between the eight parks, with each NPA receiving £125,000 in 2002/3 (£1m overall) and £200,000 in 2003/4 and in 2004/5 (£1.6m in each year).

The Fund is open to individuals or organisations from the public, private or voluntary sectors from within or outside each National Park. The level of grant support offered may be up to 75% of total costs (including contributions in kind) for the voluntary sector and up to 50% for other bodies. Applicants are expected to explore complementary grant sources to give added value to SDF funding. In exceptional circumstances up to 100% funding may be allocated though this would normally require some contribution in kind such as volunteer

¹ A comparable fund for Welsh National Parks and Welsh Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, known as the Environment Development Fund (EDF) was established in 2000 by the National Assembly for Wales to cover Welsh National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs).

² Defra, 2002 (July) Sustainable Development Fund Prospectus. Unless otherwise attributed, quotations in this document are taken from this source.

time or loan of equipment, premises, land etc. The SDF Prospectus expects that a high proportion of grants will be relatively small in order to assist a large number of groups.

In all cases, applicants must demonstrate that their project will:

- further National Park purposes³;
- be sustainable (against the test of economic, social and environmental sustainability);
- have the support or involvement of communities;
- be complementary to key local and national strategies, e.g. Local Agenda 21;
- not breach state aid rules.

The key question is *“whether a proposed project will change the attitude and behaviour of individuals and communities in ways that enhance understanding of sustainable development and the role of the National Park while promoting cooperation and social inclusion”*.

b) Administration and delivery

Innovation and originality are as much features of SDF delivery mechanisms as of the local initiatives that the Fund is intended to foster. The SDF Prospectus asks NPAs to develop their own procedures and structures appropriate to local circumstances, with the aim of encouraging innovation and high levels of participation by Park communities. Bureaucracy should be kept to a minimum.

Each Park is required to establish a small SDF Grant Advisory Panel to take decisions about allocation of the fund, although the NPA retains the power to “call in” (for further consideration by the Minister of State for Rural Affairs) approvals which do not meet the eligibility criteria or are in conflict with National Park purposes, or where there is a clear risk of financial mismanagement of the project. Otherwise the Panel operates independently

The SDF Panel can include representatives of local and regional community, business, environmental, wildlife, agriculture, tourism and recreational interests, but should be small and the main requirement is that its members can think laterally and promote innovation. The Panel is required to develop working methods that allow a speedy response to requests for grants, and to place a high level of trust in the ability of applicants to carry forward proposed projects.

The NPA should provide the secretariat for the SDF panel and is encouraged to appoint a Sustainable Development Officer to promote and manage the Fund. The Fund can be used to establish this post, but staff, administration and promotion costs should not exceed 10% on average taken over the first two years of the Fund (although expenditure on these heads is expected to have been higher in the first year when the programme is being promoted and applications nurtured). To encourage and speed the processing of small grant applications (perhaps up to £1,000) decisions may be delegated to the Sustainable Development Officer (SDO), and reported subsequently to the Panel.

c) Monitoring and evaluation

The SDF Prospectus declares that monitoring and evaluation are to involve a *“very light touch regime”*. Auditing of individual projects by the SDF panel is to be achieved mainly by

³ UK National Parks have two purposes under the 1995 Environment Act;

- 1) to conserve and enhance natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the Park and
- 2) to promote opportunities for the public understanding and enjoyment of the Park’s special qualities.

In addition, NPAs have a duty (sometimes referred to as a ‘third purpose’) to seek to foster the social and economic well being of local communities within the park (but without incurring significant expense. This qualification was added so that NPAs would work together with local authorities on social and economic objectives.)

maintaining close contact with the projects as they develop; whilst responsibility may be delegated, panel members are encouraged to take a personal interest in projects.

Each NPA is required to submit to the Minister of State for Rural Affairs (and to copy to the Countryside Agency) an annual report, which should summarise the performance of the fund against performance indicators. These indicators are not specified in the prospectus; they should focus primarily on output measures to be developed by NPAs themselves in the light of experience of the fund. NPAs are encouraged to learn from the experience of delivering the Fund and to promote the results to a wider rural audience. First Annual Reports must be submitted to the Minister of State for Rural Affairs (and copied to the Countryside Agency) at the end of March 2004⁴.

⁴ It has been agreed that CEPAR's Interim Report (March 2003) satisfies any earlier need for reporting on the part of individual Parks

2) CEPAR's external evaluation

In addition to these individual Park reports, The Countryside Agency (CA) contracted London University's Centre for European Protected Area Research (CEPAR) in January 2003 to undertake an independent 'low key evaluation' for Defra of the implementation and uptake of SDF and to report (in March 2004) on the effectiveness of SDF in its first 18 months, with recommendations on the future of the fund.

This present document is this Final Report.

For the sake of brevity, NPAs are referred to in this Report by letter code as follows:

Authority ID	Park Name
BA	Norfolk and Suffolk Broads
DT	Dartmoor National Park
EX	Exmoor National Park
LD	Lake District National Park
NH	Northumberland National Park
NY	North York Moors National Park
PD	Peak District National Park
YD	Yorkshire Dales National Park

a) Approach

CEPAR has carried out its work in two phases. Data inputs for both phases are based on information provided by NPAs themselves. Any survey of SDF grantholders, or study of wider outcomes of SDF implementation is outside the remit of this CA contract.

i) Phase 1

This has involved contacts by email and telephone with existing NPA Officers responsible for SDF primarily to collect data on progress in implementing the Fund, as well as workshop meetings in December 2002 and January 2003 organised by SDF Officers themselves, at which all NPAs as well as the Association of National Park Authorities (ANPA) were represented.

Principal outputs were as follows:

1. A basic report on implementation and uptake was submitted via the Countryside Agency to the Minister of State for Rural Affairs in March 2003. This went somewhat further than the short report on uptake required in the Consultants' Brief, and included a listing of all projects undertaken to that date (with objectives and financial data of each) as well as a brief discussion on SDF evaluation criteria and indicators to be used in Phase 2.
2. A common framework for sharing information and for reporting on achievements and expenditure against SDF objectives and budgets. This was established and promoted amongst English NPAs through a CA Briefing Note issued in July 2003. At the request of SDF Officers themselves, this goes beyond the simple data reporting format initially envisaged, to include recommendations (for example on park-level evaluation of SDF) to assist the production of (and secure a degree of consistency between) the NPAs' own individual annual reports. The framework was issued first informally in draft form for

comment and was then agreed at the July 2003 SDF workshop. The format is simple, aimed at providing appropriate, reliable and useful information as a basis for long term monitoring by Defra/CA at the same time as its completion provides immediate practical benefits for the individual NPAs concerned.

ii) Phase 2

This has included further data collection and individual contact with SDF Officers; two further national workshops (in July 2003 and January 2004) and personal visits to all Parks.

Principal outputs include the following⁵:

1. A final evaluation report (this document). The core of this report consists of an overall assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of SDF in assisting NPAs take forward the agenda of sustainable rural development. Beyond this, recommendations are made as to the future of SDF, in particular with regard to its possible extension beyond National Parks to Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty; to the way that the Fund in future should be administered; the way that SDF initiatives might link up with other related initiatives including other grant schemes, strategic partnerships and community strategies; and to the way that the Fund should be monitored.

This report includes three appendices.

- i. a draft framework for further monitoring and evaluation from April 2004 onwards. This is based on the Briefing Note issued by the Countryside Agency in July 2003 (above), modified in the light of experience since this date.
- ii. a listing by NPA of all SDF supported projects by value, title and Park
- iii. a selection of case studies which illustrate the range of successful SDF initiatives and which provides insight and guidelines for good practice

In addition, a brief description of all projects funded by SDF to date each with a commentary (from the responsible SDF Officer) on its effectiveness in meeting Fund objectives is provided in a separate volume.

2. In addition to this main evaluation report, a separate 'Research Note' summarises the findings of the final report in a concise and accessible way.

In addition to general oversight by the CA's project officer (John Butterfield) the project has also benefited from input by Richard Gunton (North York Moors NP, acting as coordinator for NP SDF officers) and Martin Fitton (ANPA). As stated above, data inputs for both phases are based on information provided by NPAs themselves. Moreover the timing required in the project brief means that the report has been produced without the benefit of the monitoring and annual reports from individual NPAs (which have to be delivered to the same timeframe). For this reason there may also be some discrepancies in financial and other data reported in this national evaluation and the individual Park reports. Unless otherwise stated all data in this report are as at 1st March 2004.

b) Methodology

Throughout our monitoring we have been mindful of the stipulation in the SDF Prospectus that evaluation should be 'low key' and also that the monitoring itself should further the objectives of SDF as a 'learning programme' for NPAs as well as for recipients and beneficiaries of SDF funding. This is an ongoing process, in which CEPAR has been engaged, but not in any directive way. There has understandably been some enthusiasm on the part of busy SDF officers for CEPAR to lead and direct, but we have taken the view that this would be wrong. SDF teams continue to develop their own procedures for monitoring

⁵ In addition, an article has been produced for publication in *Countryside Focus* to promulgate the achievements of SDF to date.

and evaluation of individual projects and it is the view of CEPAR that they should continue to do so. This is an ongoing process and it would be wrong at present to try to impose any uniformity in approach. This would be beyond the project brief and would hamper the innovative nature of SDF. Monitoring has benefited greatly from working closely with SDF officers themselves, at the same time as we have been careful to preserve our own objectivity as consultants.

CEPAR's evaluation and conclusions are based upon three complementary approaches;

1. Returns by NPAs themselves on Park-level outcomes of SDF, based on the July 03 Briefing Note and Table of Indicators attached.
2. CEPAR's own assessment of the objectives and contribution to sustainability of individual projects, based on information submitted by SDF officers.
3. Visits by CEPAR to each Park to assess the operation of SDF at first-hand, to 'ground truth' a selection of projects and to identify and report on exemplars of best practice.

This section deals with each of these in turn.

i) NPA returns on Park level outcomes

SDF teams have taken seriously the invitation to consider the development of summative output measures (including specific quantitative performance indicators) to assess the performance of the fund at Park level. A draft *Framework for Evaluation and Monitoring* was agreed with SDF teams as one of the outputs of Phase 1 of our monitoring, submitted to CA as Appendix 1 of the Interim Report (March 2003) and issued by the Agency as a Briefing Note to all NPAs in July 2003.

In addition to specification of basic data requirements on uptake, the Framework includes a set of simple evaluation criteria (developed in conjunction with SDF Officers themselves), which are designed to prompt consideration of how the Fund is meeting its primary objectives as defined in the SDF Prospectus. In the form of questions, these are intended both to assist the production of individual NPA Annual Reports (and to provide a degree of consistency between them) as well as to input into CEPAR's own overall assessment of the Fund's operation.

The distinction between output and input measures suggested in the SDF prospectus was felt to be a helpful focus for critical analysis, but in the spirit of SDF was not used as a bureaucratic straightjacket. For example, the creation of new partnerships or the drawing in of match funding was felt to be as much an output of, as an input to, the park-level SDF programme. A perhaps more important distinction is that between output and *outcomes* – the former as a measures of activity (such as the number of training sessions or dissemination events held) and the latter as a measure of actual achievement on the ground. In practice, however, the distinction between outputs and outcomes is sometimes unclear, for example the involvement of volunteer time was seen by SDF officers in some contexts as an 'input' (especially when presented in the SDF application as match funding in kind); at other times as an output (from projects designed specifically to generate community activity).

The criteria are reproduced in table 1., below. In order to preserve a 'light touch' their number has been kept low and several are phrased in such a way as to cover more than one of the output and input measures identified in the SDF prospectus. It is clear that in many cases, precise information or objective answers are impossible. Some critical performance outputs are, of their nature, susceptible only to subjective estimation or to a qualitative response. However, in some cases, a quantitative measure is also possible. For these, at the request of SDF Officers themselves, a table of basic indicators (to be supplemented at individual Park level by other indicators developed by SDF teams themselves) was issued with the Briefing Note in order to assist individual NPAs to compile appropriate information.

Table 1. NPA returns; evaluation questions and indicators

<i>Evaluation questions</i>	<i>Indicator (Y/N)?</i>
1. Basic Information.	
• How many enquiries/ expressions of interest/ applications were received?	Y
• How many grants were awarded (projects supported) and for what amounts (up to £1,000, from £1,001 to £5,000, over £5,000 and in total)?	Y
2. Delivering on the principles of sustainability.	
• What have been the social, environmental and economic impacts of the fund on communities and individuals?	
• How innovative are the projects supported by the fund? How has innovation been supported through the fund?	
• Are research projects leading to action?	
• What key lessons have been learned through both the successes and failures of the fund?	
• How has the fund contributed to the achievement of the Authority's statutory purposes?	
3. Breaking down barriers to sustainable development and encouraging social inclusion.	
• How many new partnerships have been created because of the fund, or supported by it?	Y
• How many community groups or other local voluntary organisations are directly involved in projects i) initially and ii) after one year?	Y
• To what extent have young people been involved in funded projects and/or the operation of the fund and how have they benefited from the fund?	Y
• How many local businesses have been involved in funded projects and/or the operation of the fund and how have they benefited from the fund?	Y
• To what extent have new links been made between urban and rural communities?	
4. Additionality and potential for extension and replication.	
• How many of the projects would not have occurred, or would have occurred on a smaller scale, if the fund had not been available?	Y
• How many projects are likely to continue beyond the funding provided by the fund, and in what form?	Y
• How many of the projects supported by the fund provide models applicable to other areas within and/or beyond the National Park? Has this been demonstrated?	Y
4. Generating awareness of sustainability.	
• How many and what kind of training/awareness raising sessions have been held on sustainability and the fund? Who attended and what sort of multiplier effects resulted?	Y
• What publicity (how much, what kind) has been given to the promotion of sustainability and to the fund?	

- Has greater awareness of the principles and practice of sustainable development been generated by the fund both with those directly involved with its operation and within the local and wider communities?

5. Value for money.

- What is the value of match funding levered in by the fund, i) by hard cash from outside bodies and ii) by contributions (e.g. labour) in kind? Where has this come from (e.g. lottery, local authority, applicant &c)?
- What percentage of the fund has been expended on administration (distinguish between staff and office costs and other costs, e.g. publicity)?
- What other resources have been involved (e.g. officer time and other contributions in kind)? What have been the true costs of administering the fund?

Y

Y

Y

All NPAs will be preparing their own annual reports to this framework at the end of March 2004. In consequence these are not available to CEPAR as an input to our own monitoring and evaluation, although we have received preliminary (written and verbal) information under all the headings above as part of our consultations with SDF officers.

In addition, all NPAs have been able to make first estimates against each of the indicators. However the indicators are of varying degrees of robustness. In several cases the variety of ways in which data has been collected means that data is not necessarily comparable between NPAs, nor is it summable across them. For example, the number of 'enquiries or expressions of interest' received (Indicator 1.) will depend on how these have been recorded. The cash value of match funding in kind depends on the way this has been calculated; the contribution from the NPA of officer time depends on what is included. Some indicators (such as the degree to which SDF funding has facilitated projects which would not have occurred without it) are of their nature capable only of a subjective estimation.

Moreover, numerical indicators can give only a limited picture of the quality of projects stimulated and of the real impact of the operation of the Fund. Here, it has been necessary for the consultants to make their own assessment independently of the subjective opinion of individual SDF officers, and this has been assisted by our own enquiries (and personal visits to each Park) in the selection of case studies. In all cases it will be important that indicators are seen (both for individual Park reports and for the overall report on the national operation of the Fund) in the context of narrative (and largely qualitative) evaluation.

Information provided by Parks (and quantitative data submitted against indicators) is discussed thematically below.,

Subsequently to the issue of the CA Briefing Note in July 2003, and in the light of experience in delivery of the fund, it has become clear that a revised Framework would be appropriate for any further monitoring. For example, clearer information is required on contributions of SDF projects to environmental protection, and greater emphasis placed on the creation of rural – urban links. A draft revised Framework is attached as Appendix i. This will need to be discussed and agreed with SDF teams if and when it is agreed that monitoring should continue beyond March 2004.

ii) CEPAR's evaluation of project objectives and outcomes

In addition to Park level data above, CEPAR has collected data on all English SDF projects funded to January 2004.

A list of project titles, SDF grant allocated and recipients is given in Appendix ii. A description of all projects funded is provided in a separate document. The latter includes SDF Officers' own summary of project objectives and content and their own brief narrative evaluation. CEPAR has encouraged SDOs to identify the weaknesses, as well as the strengths of each of their projects. It should be emphasised that there is a degree of subjectivity in all these

evaluations. They are also very variable. Some SDF officers have commented at length, whilst others, despite the invitation to do this, have offered only the briefest of assessments. Most importantly, these comments are also for the most part comments on work in progress. A high proportion of projects are still under way as at March 2004 and for most of those that have been 'signed off' it is still too early to make more than a 'first estimate' of their outcomes.

Each NPA is responsible for monitoring and assessing the outcome of its own individual projects. Already it is clear that there will be some interesting and instructive differences in the way that different Parks approach this exercise. For example some parks have requested a simple account of money spent with a short narrative report on outcomes. Others (e.g. Exmoor) have prepared a complex monitoring form (including e.g. tonnes of CO₂ not produced), which the SDF officer intends to complete together with the grantholder. However the outcomes of this Park- level monitoring are not available for inclusion in this Report. They are in any case likely in many cases to be preliminary estimates of probable outcomes.

Although each NPA is responsible for its own project monitoring, we have interpreted our brief as including the need to make some independent evaluation of project content and potential outcomes in terms of the objectives of SDF. Accordingly we have devised our own 'scoring' system for individual projects in order to produce our own overall evaluation of the outcomes of SDF based upon the project information provided by SDF teams.

The Prospectus requires projects to further National Park purposes; to be sustainable; to have the support or involvement of communities; to be complementary to key local and national strategies (such as Agenda 21); and not to breach State Aid rules. The Prospectus also provides a relatively long list of potential project inputs and outputs. In practice, whilst it is relatively easy to screen project applications against these criteria, it is difficult to use them objectively as a basis for assessing project worth, and even more so to use the criteria as a basis for monitoring and evaluating project outcomes.

Several NPAs have attempted to develop selection and evaluation procedures based on the two national park purposes (the conservation of natural beauty wildlife and cultural heritage and the furtherance of public enjoyment and understanding) and on their duty to seek to further the social and economic well being of local communities. It is important that funded projects are not in conflict with the purposes and that they do indeed further some of them. However it is difficult in practice to use these 'three purposes' as a framework for monitoring and only one Park (Exmoor) has attempted to do so.

The first purpose – the conservation of natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage - is arguably extensible to other dimensions of natural and cultural capital, which might be considered central to sustainability, such as energy conservation.

Enjoyment and understanding are broad and multivalent categories, in content and application. Enjoyment refers typically primarily to legitimate recreational activities of visitors and park residents, but could be (and in some NPA applications is) extended to any measure likely to enhance the subjective sense of well being of either group. Understanding likewise could be applied broadly across a cognitive and behavioural spectrum from awareness/ knowledge to concern/ engagement, which are part of social capital and active citizenship. It could also be applied more narrowly to the generation and acquisition of skills and competencies (i.e. human capital), which are an essential part of rural economic revival (but also fundamental to conservation of the natural and cultural heritage).

Social and economic well being is perhaps the most clearly recognisable by its presence or absence, but is more difficult to articulate simply in operational (i.e. measurable) terms. Economic well being clearly includes conventional (monetary and employment) indicators of economic activity but also the long-term sustainability of productive activities. Social well being includes the positive outcomes of such activity for individuals and communities but

also wider concepts such as social capital and social inclusion, which are themselves contested categories.

In place of Park Purposes therefore, we have chosen to base our assessment on a limited number of simple criteria which (for individual projects) we have assessed in subjective (and non – numerical) terms, but which when summed provide some quantitative estimate of output. This corresponds to some extent with the CA's 'Quality of Life Capital' approach⁶ but we have not found it helpful to adhere closely to the terminology.

Every project description and evaluation has been coded by the consultants. This was done first by each of the three members of the project team independently. They then met to discuss and agree their code allocations under the categories indicated in table 2 below.

⁶ See e.g. Department of the Environment Transport and the Regions. 1999. *Quality of Life Counts. Indicators for sustainable development for the United Kingdom: a baseline assessment*. London: DETR.; CAG Consultants and Land Use Consultants. 1997. *What Matters and Why: Environmental Capital- a new approach*. Cheltenham: Sustainable Development Branch, Countryside Commission.; English Heritage, Environment Agency, The Countryside Agency, and English Nature. 2001. *Quality of Life Capital. Managing` environmental, social and economic benefits*. London: CAG Consultants.

Table 2. CEPAR's framework for project content analysis

Concept		Category		Criterion
Resource protection & 'special qualities'	Natural capital	Biotic	Species, biotopes, whole landscapes	1) Is there significant benefit to/ protection of flora/fauna, or biotopes?
		Abiotic	Energy, mineral resources, biogeochemical cycles	2) Is consumption reduced, reuse/recycling promoted or harmful outputs restricted?
	Cultural capital	Fixed and mobile artefacts	Historic and built environment; in situ and ex situ.	3) Are valued structures and artefacts preserved/ enhanced (on site or (e.g.) in museums)?
Understanding, enjoyment, and social and economic well- being	Economic capital	Money, Employment		4) Are jobs created or income generated (within the local or Park economy)?
	Human capital	Competence, knowledge and understanding		5) Are valued skills being retained/ generated, or is knowledge being secured/ spread?
	Social capital	Participation, and citizenship		6) Is there significant additional involvement and engagement of local communities or the wider public?
		Inclusion, equality, opportunity	Class, gender, age, ethnicity, (dis)ability, refugees.	7) Are disadvantaged or excluded groups enabled and included?
Robustness & risk	Continuation or extension in time			8) Will the activity continue beyond the lifetime of SDF funding?
	Replication or extension in space			9) Can the project be extended or replicated elsewhere (inside or outside the Park)?
Innovation	Social learning			10) Does the project involve a significant re-examination or change in awareness, understanding, attitudes and/or behaviour on the part of those affected?*

* This last criterion could in principle include 'failed' pilots and projects from which significant lessons could be derived.

The outcome of this analysis should be qualified by several caveats:

- i. Grant expenditure, and leverage (in cash and kind) is not included here. This is an indicator in the NPA's own Park – level evaluation and returns. The focus here is on the

qualitative components of sustainability. However it would in principle be possible to quantitate the application of these criteria (albeit subjectively, see iii. below) to provide some indication of 'value for money'.

- ii. Within the above categories, a finer analysis is possible (and has been made in the original coding). However the finer the degree of analysis, the less satisfactory are some of the categories. For example in criterion 1 '**is there significant benefit to/ protection of flora/fauna, or habitats?**' a distinction in coding was made between projects which aimed to protect particular species, those which were aimed at particular valued biotopes ('habitats') and those which were focused on the conservation of whole landscapes. However landscape protection often (though not always) involves policies to conserve particular biotopes; and habitat protection is often a favoured means of protecting particular species (conversely, species protection projects often offer protection to habitats, and contributes to whole landscape protection). Similarly, projects that offer jobs to those who would otherwise be unemployed, generally produce revenue for local businesses and *vice versa* (criterion 4).
- iii. No attempt has been made to quantify the level of achievement within particular criteria, or to distinguish between those which (for example) might score highly within one or two criteria only and those which rate on more criteria but where the overall contribution to each, is less. Quantification of outputs (beyond those which are incorporated as indicators in the park- level evaluation, above) has been much discussed by SDF teams since the release of the CA briefing note in summer 2003 but is still at a developmental stage. Several NPAs are attempting to develop effective sustainability performance measures and it is hoped that this diversity of approach will prove a fruitful input to any further national monitoring of the project.
- iv. Each of the criteria identified above raises major conceptual or theoretical issues which are beyond the scope of this report but belie the apparent simplicity of the analysis. For example, 'social capital' is itself a highly contested category⁷. Most of those who see social capital as a useful tool for policy analysis would wish to distinguish between its different forms, for example those that are mediated by the market as opposed to those that are based on hierarchical or social relations⁸. Whilst social capital is generally seen as a social and economic good⁹, there are those who point out that particular forms of social capital can contribute to social exclusion and may maintain the interests of dominant groups or inhibit social learning and social change¹⁰. It is for this reason that social inclusion and social learning are identified as distinct criteria from social capital in the analysis above).
- v. The criteria are not commensurable. That is, they each refer to different and conceptually distinct entities so that scores allocated within each criterion cannot be added between them.

iii) Park visits and case studies

CEPAR's third approach to monitoring involved in-person visits to each Park to assess the operation of SDF at first- hand. Visits had several objectives:

- To collect in depth / contextual information in order to inform and support findings and recommendations arising from the national analysis.

⁷ Field, John. 2003. *Social Capital*. London: Routledge.

⁸ Adler, Paul S and Seok-Woo Kwon. 2002. Social Capital; Prospects for a New Concept. *Academy of Management Review* 27, no. 1: 17-40.

⁹ Schuller, Tom. 1998. The Complementary Roles of Human and Social Capital. *Isuma; Canadian Journal of Policy research* 2, no. 1; and Putnam, Robert. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

¹⁰ Fine, Ben. 2001. *Social Capital versus Social Theory: political economy and social science at the turn of the millenium*. London: Routledge.

- To 'ground truth' a selection of projects, to identify exemplars of best practice and to collect further information on these. These exemplars are discussed in Appendix ii to this report.
- To secure 'enrichment' material from the case studies (interviews, quotes) which might be used in *Countryside Focus* (CF) and other articles and to secure (digital, reproduction quality) photos which could be so used.

Visits undertaken (and projects visited) are presented in table 3 below:

Table 3 Schedule of visits January – March 2004;

NPA Date Who	Projects visited * site visit/ SDO briefing only (no meeting with project participants)
YD Tue 13/ Wed 14 Jan RC, DM, MA	YD08 North Craven Composing YD09 Yellow Brick Road YD24 Fell Farming Traineeships*
DT Wed 11/ Thu 12 Feb RC, MA	DT34 Proper Job Composting DT35 Courtyard community Café DT36 Lustleigh Village Hall rebuilding feasibility study* DT42 Replica Bronze Age Round House DT72 Moorland management training feasibility study (Discussion following a presentation from Bob Cartwright (Head of Park Management for LDNP) on LD21 Fell farming Traineeships)
EX Thu 12/ Fri 13 Feb RC, MA	EX213 Biomass energy EX225 Hydrogeneration EX226 Dormice project EX236 SW Wood Fuels Ltd EX239 Dunster Tithe Barn Community Centre EX305 Wimbleball path improvements* EX318 re-launch of Dunster Gallery*
PD Fri 13 Feb DM	PD004 Hope Valley College PD010 Glossopdale Furniture PD026 Whirlow Hall Farm
NY Tue 24 Feb RC	NY03 Econoplas: Sustainable drainage from waste plastic NY04 Bioflame; Clean burn technology NY16 Basics Plus: Practical conservation for special needs adults* NY25 BTEC 1 st Diploma in Countryside Management
BA Wed 3 Mar DM	BA10 The Ark Nancy Oldfield Trust BA16 Broadland Reed and sedge harvesting rejuvenation BA17 Broad futures
NH Thu 4 Mar DM	NH03 A sense of Place NH02 Exploring the Centre of Britain NH22 Shop extension and associated work at the Border Reiver
LD Fri 5 Mar DM	LD21 Fell Farming Traineeships LD12 Village composting scheme LD06 Patchwork garden

It should be emphasised again that in all the above, any systematic survey of (or data collection from) SDF grantholders, or other project beneficiaries is outside the remit of the contract brief. Although Park visits enabled us to put some flesh on the bones of the information supplied by SDF teams, to see a small number of projects at first hand and to talk with grant recipients and project participants, this in no way provides a representative picture of the operation of the fund at Park level.

The sections that follow describe the outcome of our analysis using the above sources and approaches, under three heads:

- i. Basic quantitative (numerical and financial) data on implementation, administration, uptake and delivery
- ii. Qualitative data on projects including analysis by location of expenditure, category of applicant, and content of project.
- iii. Project outcomes and delivery of sustainability objectives.

In addition to the above, a list of individual projects supported by SDF to March 2004 is provided in Appendix ii and a more detailed description of all projects supported by SDF to March 2004 is provided in a separate document.

A more detailed discussion of a number of selected case studies with pointers to best practice is provided in Appendix iii

CEPAR believes that there is more that could be learnt from SDF with regard to rural delivery (particularly in the wake of the Haskins' report) and the achievement of sustainability at 'grass roots' level. Particular issues include the effectiveness of such funding in securing leverage for the implementation of rural policy objectives and the reality of the supposed virtues of social capital, citizenship and community action. This requires further research. There are also significant issues to do with the role of protected areas as test beds for innovation in the wider countryside. Where appropriate, therefore, we have felt free to go beyond the terms of the brief to make observations on these matters.

3) Implementation, uptake and expenditure.

This section considers CEPAR's analysis of SDF in terms of:

1. Arrangements for administration and implementation of SDF within English NPAs
2. Uptake of the fund and expenditure on project grants, including issues to do with match funding and expenditure on SDF administrations
3. Objectives and outcomes of SDF supported projects.

a) Procedures and structures

All English National Park Authorities (NPA) have instituted effective arrangements for implementation and delivery of SDF and its objectives.

All NPAs bar one employ a full-time SDF Project Officer and most have at least a part-time administrative assistant. In the Peak District two half-time SDF Officer posts were allocated, but the second was not appointed until February 2004. In Exmoor the introduction of SDF was taken as the opportunity to appoint (in May 2003) a full time Sustainability Officer who spends 3 days per week on SDF; the remaining 40% of his time is occupied with wider sustainability issues within the NPA. In the Broads the SDF Officer is an external contractor employed for 2 days per week.

The arrangements adopted, and the speed of their implementation, vary between NPAs. Several NPAs had arrangements in place (and an SDF officer in post) by September 2002. Others instituted interim arrangements pending establishment of effective committee oversight and appointment of dedicated officers. For example Exmoor's scheme was launched in October 2002 at a consultative meeting to which all Parish, District and County Councils were invited and publicised by means of leaflets and press releases but until May the following year was administered directly by the Head of Planning, enabled SDF to get 'off the ground' prior to the Sustainability Officer taking post.

In most park authorities, SDF is administered in-house. One NPA (Yorkshire Dales) has appointed a pre-existing Millennium Trust (established in 1996, whose objectives are in line with those of SDF) to administer the Fund (with the NPA reserving the right to 'call in' applications under agreed circumstances). The Millennium Trust employs the SDF Project Officer and in return receives an annual payment of £10,000 plus a further management fee of 5% of all project costs funded up to a maximum of £5,000.

In one Park (Lake District) the NPA has committed additional monies of its own (£250,000 in 2003-4) to increase substantially the total funding available. Here, the significantly enhanced sum available (£375,000 in year 1) was split into 5 partnership 'pots' to ensure a spread of different types of project. Specific arrangements have been made for small grant allocations through local Parish and District Councils, and a second tranche of money has been earmarked for large scale projects which are county wide in their application or which are promoted by regional or national organisations. The Lake District SDF monies have therefore been allocated specifically to community led partnership projects.

In the Broads small SDF grants are delivered from within a wider separate Small Grants Scheme which the Authority operates specifically for the benefit of smaller organisations.

Other NPAs have their own dedicated funding streams (and differ in their eligibility or uptake of national or European funding streams such as ESA or LEADER+) that exist alongside SDF. Data on uptake and grant distribution needs to be interpreted in the light of these special arrangements.

In some cases the existence of complementary grant schemes is unlikely to have greatly affected SDF grants. For example in North York Moors Objective 2 funding operates only in the eastern (and coastal) part of the area. However in other cases it may be significant. For

example, neither Northumberland NP nor North York Moors NP are ESAs, however North York Moors has its own well-established agro-environmental scheme (funded entirely from NP sources) whilst Northumberland does not, so that alternative funding sources may assume a higher significance in Northumberland.

All NPAs have instituted some form of (volunteer) panel system for overseeing delivery. In most NPAs, the panel consists of between 8 and 10 members and external interests are well represented. In Exmoor the SDF panel consisted initially of a sub-committee of authority members; it was replaced from April 2003 by a one consisting mainly of 'outside' representatives of community, business and environmental interests, filled by advertisement, and serviced by a single member of the NPA staff. In Exmoor a panel of 12 members is argued to provide a greater breadth of interest (and broader discussion) than if it was comprised of only the 8 proposed in the SDF prospectus. Whilst all other Parks have at least one NPA member on the SDF panel, none have more than two. In the Broads the eight panel members include a 16 year old school student and another young person currently studying at a local university. In North York Moors youth representation on the panel rotates between apprentices on the NP training scheme.

There are perceived advantages and disadvantages of SDF administration through a panel that is separate from the Park Authority. The Panel can act autonomously, developing its own definitions of sustainability, criteria for project acceptance, implementation and monitoring independently of NPA priorities and procedures, and is less susceptible to any pressure to use the fund as a resource for achieving institutional objectives or supplementing shortfalls in funding elsewhere. However it also for this reason risks being seen as a threat, or alternatively ignored as irrelevant to, these objectives. In fact, this does not seem to have happened in any Park, but the independence of the Panel does mean that an effort may need to be made to secure the active participation of NPA officers in individual projects.

Procedures for receiving and processing applications vary. Several NPAs distribute application forms with grant information. The most detailed (14 page) application form – with equally detailed explanatory notes and guidance is provided by Northumberland. In addition to decision criteria for successful applications, this discusses the special qualities of Northumberland and includes definitions of sustainability, of pollution, of 'Visitor Payback', Environmental Impact Assessment and of environmental management systems (EMAS) such as ISO4001! Whilst this may be helpful or illuminating to some applicants (and important in the case of large grant applications) it seems likely that it may have proved intimidating to others. By contrast other NPAs invite informal initial enquiries in any medium; these are then 'worked up' into a form in which they can be submitted to the panel.

In three NPAs the application form itself is available on-line. In others, written or verbal expressions of interest are invited, but application forms are not completed until the SDF Officer has discussed the matter further, often with the applicant on site. In some cases (e.g. North York Moors) individual panel members act as first contact points for enquirers whom they then assist to work up formal applications and/or take on a 'pastoral' role in overseeing their implementation. Both Yorkshire Dales and Exmoor have a two stage application process. After initial screening of expressions of interest, (Exmoor) or outline application (Yorkshire Dales) the application then goes before the panel and if approved in principle the applicant is referred to the relevant NPA officer for further discussion and to be elaborated in detail by applicant and SDF officer together before a formal application for funding is considered. This has advantages but carries also the risk of reducing the independence of the applicant and the autonomy of the panel. In Exmoor all applications are screened first by the NPA Senior Management Team (SMT) before they are seen by the Panel; during our discussions with Exmoor panel members they told us that they would like to see all applications (including those that had been refused by SMT), and we believe that this would be in keeping with the spirit of SDF.

In most cases, applications up to £1000 are adjudicated directly by the SDF Officer and reported subsequently to the SDF Panel. In one case (Exmoor) the ceiling has been set at £2,000. Applications in excess of these sums are adjudicated by the SDF panel.

Most panels appear to meet at least quarterly.

The detail of financial and project control applied varies greatly. In the Yorkshire Dales, contracts under £3,000 or between £3,000 and £10,000 require respectively 2 or 3 quotes and for works over £10,000 two full competitive tenders, all with the final selection to be approved by the SDF officer. Evidence of land ownership, appropriate written permissions and a 10- year maintenance agreement may all be required if appropriate.

The process of instituting arrangements for SDF delivery has itself been a learning process. Some MPs (e.g. Dartmoor) initially attempted to introduce selection through objective project scoring, but found this mechanical and counterintuitive, so then moved to 'summative assessment' of projects through extended panel discussion.

Formal evaluation of the relative merits of different approaches is beyond the remit of the brief for this report. In general the relative balance of advantage seems to lie with the 'hands on' involvement of the SDF Officer and/or individual Panel members (or members or officers of the NPA). However at the same time the dangers of such a relationship need to be recognised, including that of possibly 'skewing' the direction of funded projects towards the delivery of specific NPA objectives, or of leading to loss of 'ownership' of the project by the grantholder.

b) Uptake and expenditure

Summary data on uptake and implementation are provided in table 4 below.

Table 4. Summary data on interest and uptake

Park ID	Number of enquiries	All SDF grants			Grants up to £1,000			Grants over £1,000		
		Number	Value	Avg	Number	Value	Avg	Number	Value	Avg
BA	149	33	£297,900	£9,027	11	£9,354	£850	22	£288,546	£13,116
DT	135	44	£234,584	£5,331	2	£1,704	£852	42	£232,880	£5,545
EX	94	32	£340,723	£10,648	3	£1,718	£573	29	£339,005	£11,690
LD	200	57	£398,981	£7,000	7	£5,269	£753	50	£393,712	£7,874
NH	148	30	£291,700	£9,723	9	£7,338	£815	21	£284,363	£13,541
NY	70	25	£293,192	£11,728	2	£1,035	£518	23	£292,157	£12,702
PD	149	58	£251,668	£4,339	17	£12,001	£706	41	£239,667	£5,846
YD	149	31	£288,000	£9,290	4	£2,574	£644	27	£284,426	£10,534
Total	1094	310	£2,396,749		55	£40,992		255	£2,354,756	
Avg	137	39	£299,594	£7,731	7	£5,124	£745	32	£294,345	£9,234

Because of the variety of ways in which SDF is administered, information on enquiries and applications (as with some other indicator data provided by different parks) cannot be safely summed across NPAs, nor can comparisons be made between them. Some Parks have attempted to log all requests for information; others have recorded only formal applications. In some Parks, as stated above, applications forms as well as information about SDF are readily available on the Park website; others have discouraged formal applications until these have been 'worked up' from enquiry stage with the help of a panel member or NPA officer.

In the Broads the fund Administrator keeps a log of all incoming enquiries and makes a point of discussing projects in detail and, if necessary, suggesting ways of improving their suitability before sending out application packs. Of the 149 recorded enquiries quoted, 112 were sent application packs. This resulted in 37 applications that were not - and could not be - eligible for SDF support and a further 55 applications which went forward to the SDF panel, of which 33 were accepted for funding. The Yorkshire Dales received 69 formal applications (of which 31 have been accepted) in addition to 80 recorded enquiries by phone or email. The highest number of recorded enquiries is in the Lake District with 200, the lowest in the North York Moors with 70, however none of these figures includes informal enquiries made to individual NPA officers.

Early interest appears to have been good. By March 2003, over 600 expressions of interest had been recorded and the total to March 2004 is over 1,000, ranging by NPA from 70 (North York Moors) to 200 (Lake District). One NPA (Yorkshire Dales) felt it has enough high quality applications already on stream by mid 2003 and made a deliberate decision to limit further promotion of SDF in order not to raise false expectations. This appears also to be the case with Northumberland which reports no new enquiries between March 2003 and March 2004. By contrast the Peak District was slower to get started (its allocation to March 2003 was underspent due in part to a delay in appointing an SDO) and reports a doubling of enquiries and a four-fold increase in grants awarded between March 2003 and March 2004.

Overall to March 2004 a total of over 300 projects have been approved (and grants awarded) with just under £3m of SDF monies committed. By NPA, the largest sum committed £399,000 (Lake District; 57 grants awarded). The North York Moors with 25 projects has the fewest grants awarded but its expenditure to date, at £293,000 is higher than the Peak District (£252,000) which has the highest number of grants awarded (58). These figures reflect significant differences in grant size between Parks (see below).

The flexibility of funding arrangements allowed by SDF means that it is difficult to project this data forward. Length of projects (where stated; the uncertainty over year-on-year funding has meant that several NPAs have been reluctant to record project end dates) varies greatly from a month to five years. Several NPAs have already committed on projects from next year's budget. A small number of grants appear to have been funded retrospectively for works already completed. A considerably greater number appear to be open-ended (i.e. with no fixed term). One SDF Officer has attributed this to the uncertainty over continued funding after the first 18 months of the fund. All NPAs welcome the extension of pilot SDF funding to 2004-5 but have pointed out that the late announcement of this has made it difficult for both themselves and for grantholders to plan ahead. The lack of guaranteed year on year funding led one NPA (the Broads) initially to require all funded projects to be completed within twelve months. This requirement was found to inhibit innovative projects and was dropped in favour of 'up front' funding of projects even where completion was likely to extend beyond the financial year. In other Parks, annual instalment payments have been qualified with a proviso that these are contingent on the availability of SDF funding. Such uncertainties exacerbate the problems already inherent in fixed term funding streams, particularly where they are used to support recurrent costs.

On a related topic, the revision of Treasury guidance to allow carry-over of unspent funds is an important contributor to good financial management and, in the spirit of SDF, has allowed project teams to give provisional acceptance to projects which have not yet been fully articulated, with the knowledge that some of these may not materialise within the time-frame of current funding. It has also allowed them to 'take risks' knowing that allocations to projects which then fail to develop as expected can be used elsewhere.

Other financial issues, which have been resolved differently in different Parks, include the allocation of interest from unspent funds, and of requiring returns from profitable enterprises that have resulted from SDF investment. Uniquely one NPA (Exmoor) has required a 15% return (to be reinvested in SDF and available to other applicants) from any profits of a private

hydropower scheme ^[79] 11 if and when sales of electricity to the National Grid commence. Such 'ethical reinvestments' do not seem to have been a feature of other schemes. However the principle that funding need not be just 'one-way' and that established profitable ventures should make some contribution to starting new ones, is an interesting one. If SDF becomes an established funding stream, guidance will be needed on these matters.

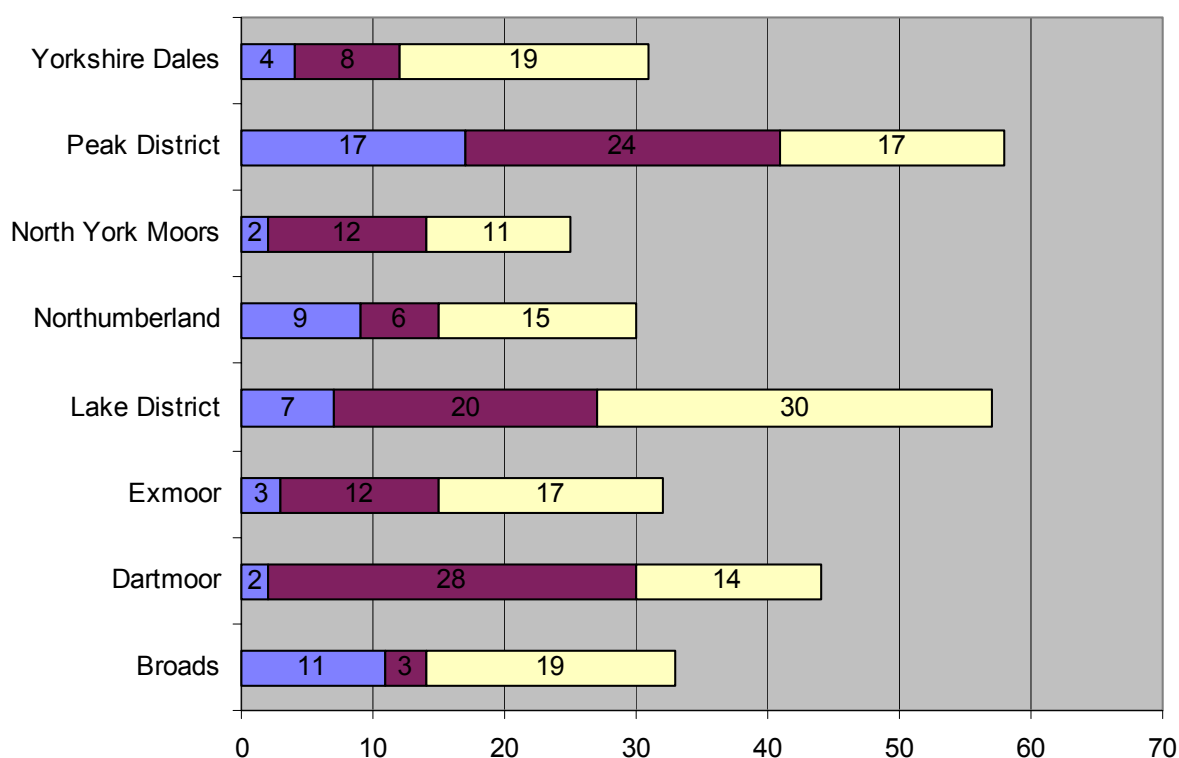
In all cases financial data presented here is not robust as there are variations among NPAs in the way that this is requested, recorded, calculated and monitored. In some cases financial information on individual project records is full, in others it is scant or variable. Some NPAs have specified grant payment on the basis of cash receipts for work done. Others have recorded only total project cost, making no distinction between contributions in cash and in kind. In some cases where large grants have been awarded or where the sums awarded appear to be in excess of the normal 75%, little information justification the grant has been provided on the project report.

i) Grant size

The average grant per SDF project is £7,700, however this conceals a great range in value of individual projects (figure 3 below). Moreover, patterns of expenditure (and hence average project grant, table 4) differ significantly among Parks (figures 1 and 2). For example the Peak District has significantly more small projects (17 up to £1,000) than other Parks. However although both Dartmoor and North York Moors have awarded only two grants below £1,000, the latter has the highest number (28) of medium sized (>£1,000 up to £5,000) grants.

Figure 1: Numbers of SDF projects by size per NPA

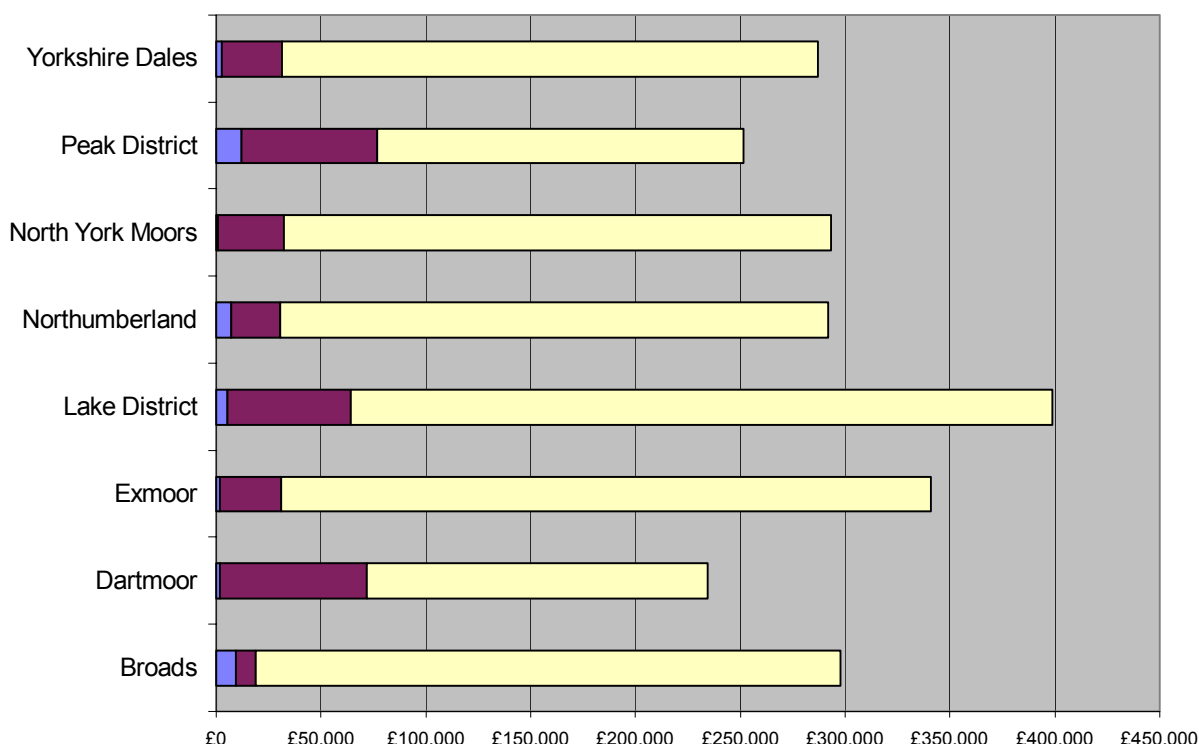
Bars for each park reflect, left to right, grants up to £1,000; over £1,000 to £5,000 and above £5,000



¹¹ Projects cited in the body of this Report are referred to by the CEPAR database register rather than the Park ID which identifies them in the appendices.

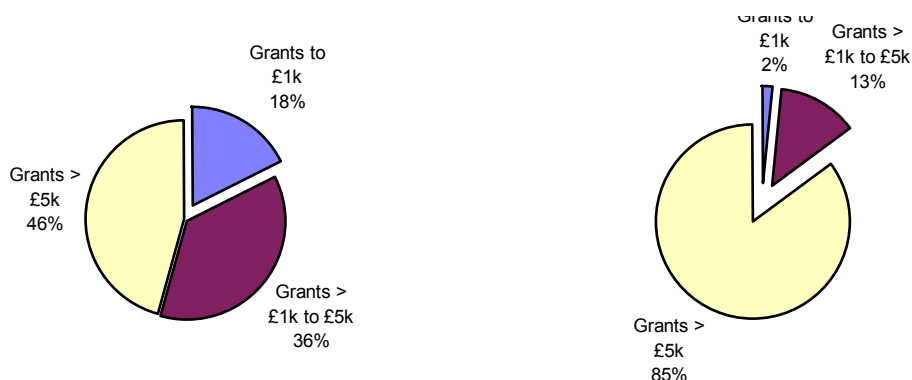
Figure 2: Spend on SDF projects by size per NPA

Bars for each park reflect, left to right, grants up to £1,000; over £1,000 to £5,000 and above £5,000



Nationally, 55 grants up to £1,000 (the implied upper limit of small grants) have been awarded (18% of the total) with an average value of just over £745 each, amounting to a spend of £41,000 (just 2% of the SDF total). In all, 255 grants over £1,000 have been awarded (72% of the total) with an average value of £9,234, amounting to a total of £2.35m (or 98% of total SDF expenditure).

If the boundary between large and small grants is taken as £5,000 however, almost 55% of the number (some 15% of the value) of SDF grant is accounted for by small grants (figure 3).

Figure 3. Distribution by number and by spend over small, medium and large grants

The lowest grants to date include £120 for a day's portaloos rental for a disabled ramblers' event^[248], £122 for two wormery composters for a village primary school^[68] and two grants of £308^[57] and £330^[266] to the Park Ranger Service towards the provision of waterproof clothing, rucksacks and mobile phones for mentally and physically handicapped children and adults on ranger-led walks and activities. The latter have already proved their worth in

making countryside activity less daunting particularly in wet weather for otherwise excluded groups from surrounding towns. All three projects are funded by the same (Peak District) NPA, which also has the lowest average spend per project at £4,339. This is comprised of 17 grants of £1,000 or below and a further 24 grants from £1,000 to £5000.

The single highest grant to date is £61,000 ^[174] to support the heritage and tourism activities of the Exmoor pony trust. This is followed by two at £50,000 one ^[155] towards a demonstration district heating project in Newcastle involving woodchip biomass technology from Northumberland, the other ^[238] for a visitor centre using green building materials in the Broads.

Even apparently hard data on grant size distribution must be interpreted with care. In the Lake District a small grants scheme (delivered through Parish councils) was well established before the introduction of SDF and has skewed the use of the SDF towards larger projects. There is some feeling that this may have undermined the message of SDF. In the view of some SDF teams (e.g. Peak District) it is the smaller grants that best embody the spirit of SD and serve to promulgate its message; the Peak District have deliberately discouraged larger and more costly projects (which it feels are in any case more easily funded from other sources within the Park) in favour of smaller grants, despite the added administrative work that this involves, because of a belief that these small projects offer better value.

By contrast other NPAs (e.g. Yorkshire Dales) feel that it is the larger projects that offer best value because of their potential for significant innovation, and because of their newsworthiness and the multiplier effects that they can bring. Larger grants are perhaps more easily secured by bodies used to preparing grant applications (Groundwork Trust, local authorities) that are more likely to have the confidence to apply for, and the competence to handle, big projects. There is the danger that this may reinforce existing trajectories of the organisations concerned, against the entry of new players (and approaches). However several NPAs have reported difficulty in attracting small grant applications, in some cases with monies specifically earmarked for small grants being unspent.

ii) Leverage, in cash and kind

NPAs were asked to identify the value and source of match funding levered in by the Fund, by hard cash and by contributions (e.g. labour) in kind from grantholders themselves and outside bodies. Park returns show match funding of over £13m cash and over £750,000 in kind (table 5).

Table 5. Match funding in cash and kind

Park ID	Match funding			
	Hard cash	%	In kind	%
BA	£2,077,642	697%	£39,700	13%
DT	£601,078	256%	£109,023	46%
EX	£885,062	260%	£119,186	35%
LD	£2,439,287	611%	£84,351	21%
NH	£2,735,359	938%	£104,480	36%
NY	£2,557,109	872%	£51,000	17%
PD	£814,562	324%	£204,843	81%
YD	£1,004,871	349%	£45,213	16%
Total	£13,114,970		£757,796	
Average	£1,639,371	547%	£94,724	32%

Cash receipts for expenditure prior to final grant settlement appear to have been required by some NPAs but not by all. Where receipts are required, they provide an incomplete basis on which to calculate total expenditure. Moreover not all the cash

leverage can be regarded necessarily as real input to the local economy. For example, in a number of projects, expenditure was on 'bought in' finished goods where (as the SDF Officer sometimes pointed out) these could have been sourced locally.

Contributions in kind raise other issues. Most SDF teams appear to have used standard local authority conversion rates for attaching a cash value to voluntary inputs, even though (in contrast to Welsh EDF) these are not specified in the prospectus. However inputs themselves have not been independently quantified and there has been uncertainty in some cases whether they should be treated as a project input (and thus appear as leverage) or as an output. It has, nevertheless, been a major advantage that volunteer time is allowed as an element of match funding (this was not the case until recently) and this is a valuable aspect of the scheme that should be retained.

In a number of cases SDF funding was allocated for pre-bid work for substantial (e.g. HLF) funding. There has been some debate within SDF teams on this, which concluded that this is a legitimate use of SDF funds, in particular for small organisations that would otherwise find difficulty in putting a bid together. However the use of SDF funding in this way does require judgement about the likelihood of a positive grant application.

Overall, total reported match funding in terms of contributions in cash and kind amounts to over £2 million (or some £¼ m per NPA). These estimates of match funding are based on figures provided by individual NPAs who appear to have derived them in most instances from data provided in SDF project applications, rather than from any analysis of project outcomes (for which it is in any case too early). Certainly neither category of match funding can be regarded in its entirety as leverage (or, in the case of cash, as an injection into the local economy) for which some judgement would be required as to how much was absolutely contingent upon SDF funding (and in the case of grant applications, their success). It is not possible to do this at this stage and until this is done, the real benefits in cash and kind, to local economies and to community life, are difficult to estimate with precision.

iii) Administrative costs

SDF teams were asked to specify the amount of SDF funding which has been expended on administration and to distinguish between staff and office costs and other costs (e.g. publicity). Average reported expenditure, is 6% of the fund allocation and in all cases spend from SDF is within the 10% ceiling specified in the Prospectus and in several instances is significantly lower.

The figures presented in table 6 are likely to be an underestimate of the true costs of delivery however, first, because it has taken some time after the announcement of the fund for staff to be appointed, second, because of uncoded support (particularly in officer time) provided by the NPA. For example, in the Peak District an NPA officer is allocated half time to SDF business but her salary (and other ancillary costs) are found from the Park budget and no delivery costs are attributed to SDF. In Exmoor 60% of the time of the SDO (who has been in post for only 11 months) is coded to the Fund.

In all cases, however, it is likely that there have been significant inputs (in staff time, office accommodation and expenses &c) from other sources, including those of the NPA. In order to estimate the true costs of administering the Fund, SDF teams were also asked to estimate what other resources have been involved (including officer time and other contributions in kind). All returns indicate that SDF delivery has been supported by significant additional resources from NPA sources. Such contributions in kind are difficult to estimate and it is likely that they are calculated differently in different NPAs. However several NPAs have emphasised the significant input into delivery and administration of SDF from authority sources and there is no doubt that this is a major contribution to the success of SDF to date.

Table 6. Expenditure on delivery (from SDF and other sources)

Park ID	Admin spend on delivery		
	From the Fund	% of Fund	From other sources
BA	£19,260	6%	£5,000
DT	£32,500	10%	£16,985
EX	£19,206	6%	£22,500
LD	£0	0%	£21,000
NH	£33,300	10%	£24,200
NY	£20,000	6%	£4,912
PD	£26,808	8%	£18,145
YD	£22,000	7%	£32,698
Average	£21,634	7%	£18,180

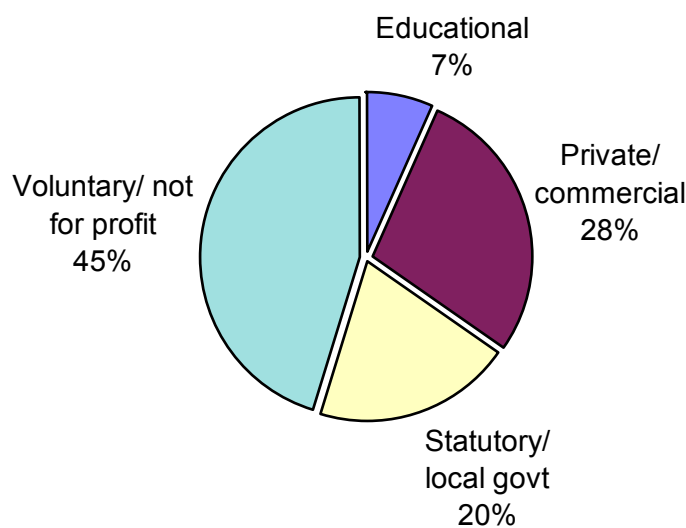
The one case where the tabled figures are likely to a good indication of real costs is the Broads, where the fund is administered by an experienced external contractor who invoices the Fund via the NPA on a 'work done' basis. All but £152 of the £19,260 quoted (5.9% of SDF funding) has been used to pay his invoices. The only other contribution made has been the equivalent of £5,000 in BA officer time. (This figure includes a 25% allowance for unreported work and relates to activities directly associated with SDF and a small number of SDF projects. It does not include SDF project work carried out as part of an officer's normal duties). The officers concerned have either provided the SDF Panel and Administrator with expert advice and assistance (e.g. PR, accounting and technical) or made particular contributions to a small number of specific projects. This brings the 'true' cost of BASDF administration to 7.5%. It is unclear how far this apparently efficient and cost-effective arrangement balances the lack of a dedicated staff member to champion the fund's role within the NPA.

The agency arrangements in Yorkshire Dales whereby 5% is added to projects costed at or below £5,000 as a management fee to the Millennium Trust have already been described. The actual reported spend of £22,000 equates to 3 days per week of officer time.

The evidence from our study has been that proper support to SDF to generate, support and to disseminate the results of good projects is critical. Small grants in particular consume a disproportionate amount of administrative support, but may also yield disproportionately high benefits. Several NPAs have argued that the proportion of SDF funding that may be allocated in this way should be allowed to rise to 15%. However this may not in itself guarantee the kind of support required. It is likely that the indirect (and difficult to quantify) support from NPA officer staff may be of the greatest significance in this respect.

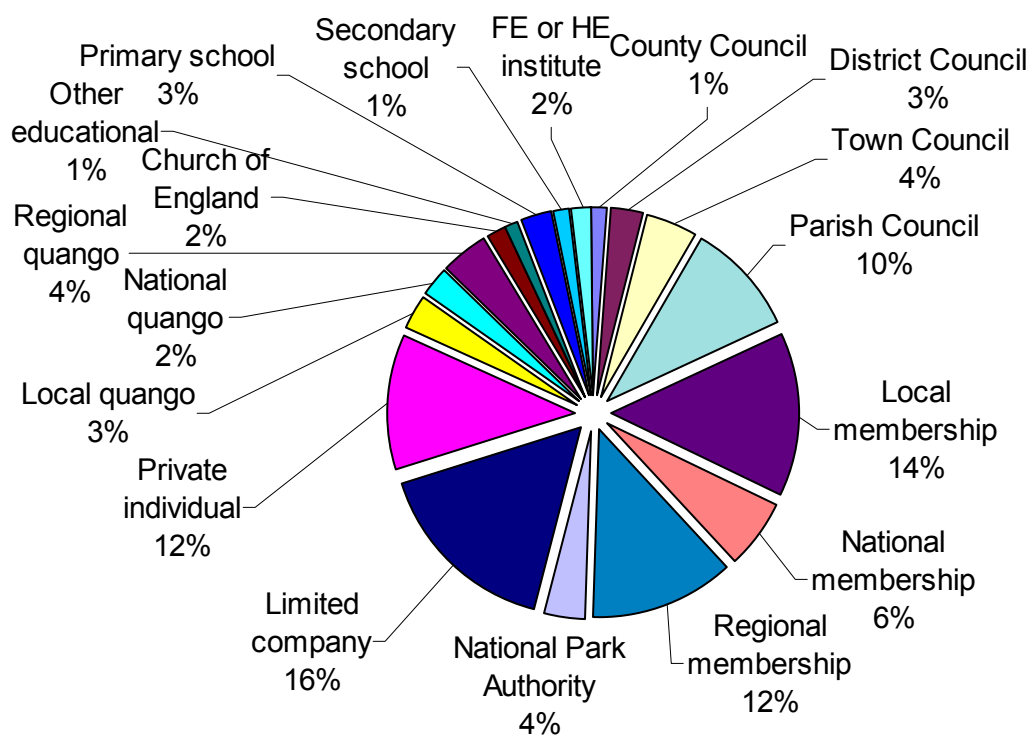
c) Project applicants

CEPAR's analysis of project grantholders shows what in our view is a good spread of funded projects between private/ commercial interests, statutory/ local government bodies and voluntary/ not for profit groups (figure 4).

Figure 4. Project grantholders by broad category

These national figures conceal some interesting differences exist between Parks. For example 16% of grants in the Peak District went to educational bodies compared to under 3% in Dartmoor which has the lowest number of allocations to statutory bodies (5%, compared to almost 35% in the Lake District) and the highest number to voluntary/ not-for-profit bodies (64%, compared to 29% in Exmoor).

Breaking these broad categories down by a more detailed analysis of grantholder shows a wide diversity of groups involved (figure 5).

Figure 5. Distribution of projects by applicant category

Different patterns emerge however if allocations by value (rather than number) are considered, and it is difficult to draw any robust conclusions from this analysis.

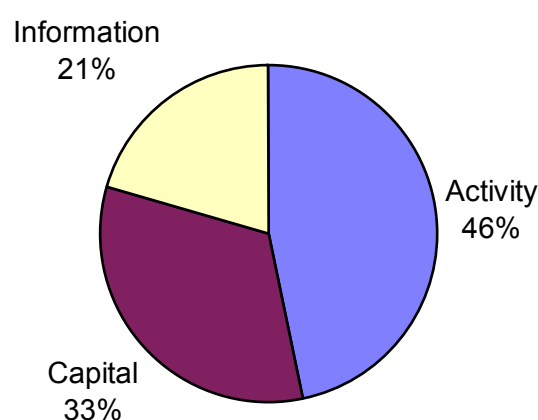
Moreover it is difficult in some cases to allocate individual grantholders to particular categories. For example, it is sometimes an arbitrary matter whether a voluntary organisation has charitable status ; it was not always clear at what level (local or regional) an application from an organisation with national membership was made; in some cases the not-for-profit status of a limited company had to be inferred. In any future monitoring it might be useful to capture such information in a similar way across different Parks.

4) Project content, objectives and outcomes

Analysis of SDF projects by objectives and outcomes has proved difficult.

An initial analysis of project content has attempted to characterise projects by the broad category of their primary purpose for which grant has been given – restoration/ renovation/ repair or the purchase or renovation of buildings or machinery (capital works); the facilitation of some form of activity involving participation by individuals or organisations, or the production of feasibility studies, grant applications, management/business plans &c (i.e. paper output).

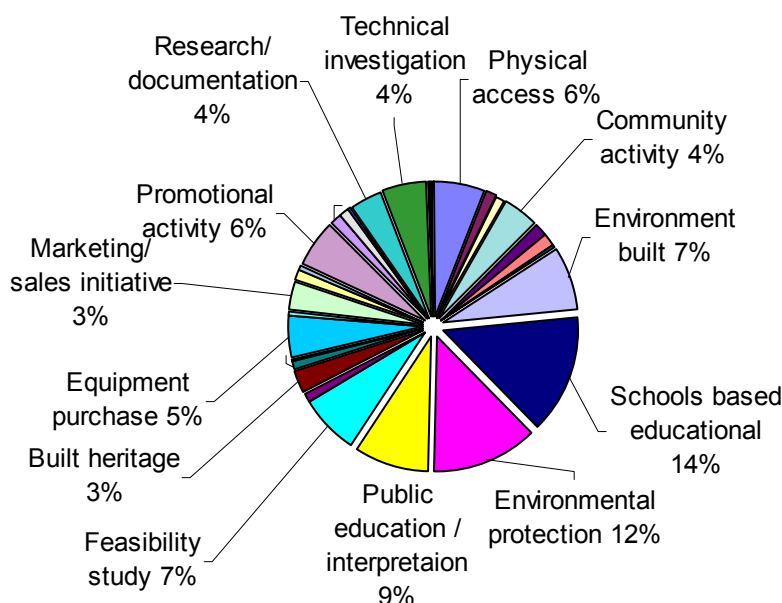
Figure 6: Frequency of projects by primary output



The categorisation used for figure 6 is crude and says nothing about the ultimate objectives (or quality) of the project in question, however the results do show a relatively balanced distribution between the three categories. Roughly one-fifth of projects had primarily an information (paper) output (e.g. report, feasibility study, grant application) and one-third primarily involved expenditure on a capital 'product' (purchase or construction/ repair of a building or technical equipment). Just under half were focused on 'doing' (where the output was something other than paper or 'built' structures) as the primary product. Projects in this category ranged from education to recycling.

In a more detailed analysis it has been necessary to separate the specific objects for which SDF grant has been given from the overall aims of the project or enterprise of which it is a part. In some cases the former is arbitrary, determined by what already exists in the applicant organisation, or what other funding has already been secured. In other cases it is critical. For example in the case of a commercial enterprise whose formal objectives are turnover and profit, SDF funding has been deemed appropriate for particular applications, that show clear environmental, or community benefits.

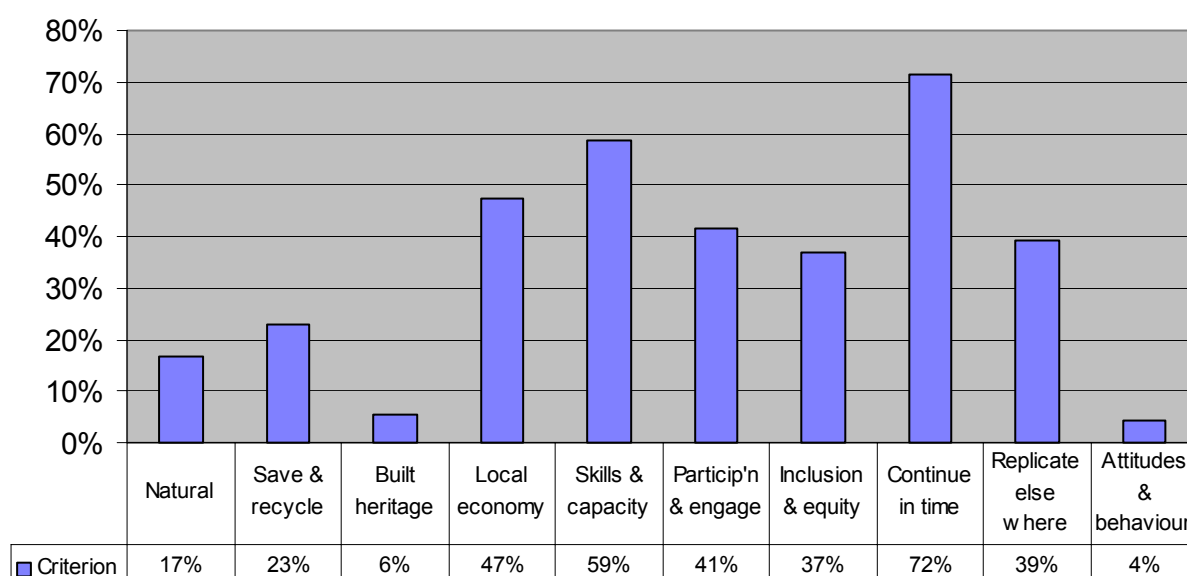
Figure 7 below attempts to identify the immediate object of SDF grant, irrespective of the overall aims of the project. Only the larger categories are labelled, however it can be seen that many categories individually account for 1% or less of projects. The principal feature that emerges is the wide range of purposes for which SDF grant has been given in this initial pilot phase of its existence.

Figure 7. Primary outputs of SDF funding

The single clearest conclusion from this more detailed analysis is the extraordinary range and diversity of grant purposes that are difficult to reduce to a limited number of categories. Beyond this, some interesting features emerge; for example education and environmental protection are the major single objectives of SDF projects. As with other analytical categories, differences between Parks (which are not presented here) must be understood in the context of their individual circumstances. For example the North York Moors has a separately funded high profile sustainable tourism programme, so that in consequence no tourism- related projects have been funded by SDF in the North York Moors. Although not an ESA, the North York Moors has its own small agro-environmental scheme so that some projects, which figure prominently in other areas, are not represented within the SDF returns.

The analyses above are based upon the number of projects in each category. A rather different picture (not presented here) emerges when data is examined by project spend. A more important limitation is that the analysis says nothing about the merit of project content in terms of their contribution to the elements of sustainability.

CEPAR's content evaluation (whereby projects were scored by a range of criteria relating to their contribution to the elements of sustainability as proposed in the framework, see table 2) provides a rather more sensitive measure of project content by ultimate outcome. The frequencies of projects meeting each of the ten criteria are presented in figure 8 below.

Figure 8. Frequency of projects with content indicated (CEPAR analysis)

Results of this analysis, and of information provided in the Park level returns, are discussed by topic below.

a) Resource protection; natural and cultural capital

Three categories can be distinguished with respect natural and cultural resource protection, roughly corresponding to the first purpose of National Parks.

i) Species, habitats and landscapes

Some 51 projects (17% of the total) contribute directly to wildlife conservation. This includes practical habitat conservation, conservation site management (and management plans) and related research. Only two projects are focused directly on Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) species recovery activities (relating to dormice in Exmoor^[103] and to juniper in the North York Moors^[98], see Case Study VIII).

ii) Energy and mineral resources (reuse, recover, recycle)

Just under a quarter of projects (69 projects or 23%) were judged to contribute significantly to 'save, reuse or recycle' (energy, raw material conservation or to pollution reduction). These include the biomass energy and hydropower^[79, 83, 132, 151, 172, 176, 271] and community composting^[60, 108, 109] projects discussed in Case Studies VI and VII. Building extension/restoration projects were only admitted to this category if they included novel energy or resource saving features as an integral part of their design.

iii) Historic and built environment

17 projects (6%) involved the conservation of artefacts^[e.g. 143] or the built environment^[e.g. 158]. Virtually all of these involved in situ protection and restoration. Building projects were excluded from this group unless a specific objective was the conservation of a threatened structure.

In all the above there was relatively little overlap between categories (only two were rated in more than one category). Overall, therefore, 134 projects (44% of the total) potentially contributed in some way to protection of the natural or cultural environment.

b) Local economy; economic and financial capital

In CEPAR's analysis of project content, just under half (143, or 47%) of all projects were deemed to contribute directly to the local economy, through the generation either of jobs, or income. The degree of project match funding (cash) was discounted in this analysis because as discussed above it is difficult to estimate how much of this can be counted as SDF 'leverage'.

In their own monitoring, SDF teams are asked to indicate how many local businesses have been involved in the operation of the Fund (and to state how they have benefited from the Fund). It is clear from returns to this indicator that this has been interpreted in very different ways in different parks. Returns range from 8 local (Lake District) businesses actively engaged as partners in project applications to a total of 681 businesses (Exmoor), which includes all those enterprises involved in the supply of goods and services to the grantholders or other project beneficiaries. In the Yorkshire Dales of the 40 businesses involved, 12 are cited as project instigators or partners and 26 as contractors or deliverers. The near- median figure of 129 businesses submitted by the Broads includes 100 food suppliers, manufacturers and retailers involved in an SDF supported study investigating the feasibility of setting up a local food supply chain^[05]. Of the remaining 29, 22 are managing SDF projects and seven are involved as prime contractors.

It is clear that the real contribution of initiatives such as SDF to local economies and local communities requires primary research beyond the scope of this initial monitoring.

c) Competence and knowledge; human capital

CEPAR analysis of project returned some 177 projects (59% of the total) which contributed significantly to the generation or retention of valued skills or competencies, or to the generation of knowledge or understanding relevant to sustainability objectives. This figure covers a spectrum of very different initiatives, from school based/ educational projects (these were not included automatically, but only if they seemed likely to generate understanding directly relevant to Park purposes) through training designed specifically to preserve or promote valued skills, to research activities, pilot studies and other projects where new or broader understanding was a likely to be a specific outcome.

d) Citizenship; social capital and social inclusion

i) Community engagement and public participation

CEPAR's analysis indicates that some 125 projects (41% of the total) involve significant local community or wider public involvement as an objective.

Park returns report a total of 680 community groups directly involved in projects. This ranges from 324 groups in the Peak District to just 15 in Northumberland. This indicator is based on SDF Officers own assessments and assumptions which may vary greatly. An appropriate multiplier might be 10 individuals per group involved. For example, Dartmoor estimates 30 named groups and 323 unnamed individuals to have been involved in SDF activities to date. Moreover the indicator is of little significance of itself – it is the degree of involvement and of human and social capital (capacity building and citizenship) that is important. Of the 52 community groups involved in the Broads, 40 are groups that will use facilities provided with SDF assistance (in a nature reserve^[7] and in a country Park education centre^[283]) and nine are directly involved in project work as conservation volunteers, parish councils, parent/teacher groups and in a village 'In Bloom' project^[2, 6, 8, 24, 26, 284, 292].

ii) Social inclusion and equality of opportunity

CEPAR's analysis indicates that some 112 projects (37%, a set significantly overlapping with community projects above) feature social inclusion or equality of opportunity as an objective. An examination of the degree to which this has been achieved would be valuable.

Two specific objectives of SDF are the involvement of young people, and the creation of new urban-rural links.

Young People

15 out of 57 projects funded in the Lake District specifically involve young persons' groups. Our estimate is that a similar proportion (i.e. around 25% of projects) in other Parks is directed at young people or youth groups.

Dartmoor NPA estimates that 218 (known) individuals are directly involved in SDF projects. However returns to this indicator are not comparable between Parks, and cannot easily be summed. Involvement may range from mere attendance at one-off events to deep participation in the operation of the SDF supported project. The Peak District estimated that by March 2003 some 30 organisations and 3,000 young people had been involved in SDF projects. This figure had doubled to 7,648 individuals by March 2004.

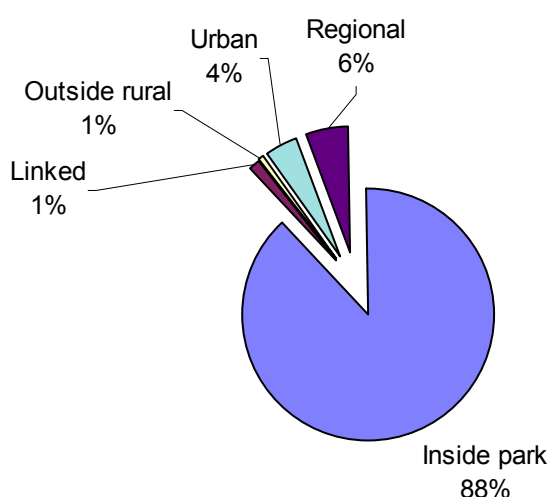
The Broads SDF Administrator calculates that 231,062 young people have already been directly involved in projects supported by the Fund. The vast majority of these are schoolchildren of which 222,000 form the target audience for an SDF-funded poster promoting sustainable angling. A further 7,600 annually will attend courses or use facilities provided by a number of SDF-funded 'Education for Sustainable Development' projects. 90 have benefited from an educational inclusion project and 1,035 will be developing a case study on sustainable tourism as part of their GCSE coursework. 300 young people with disabilities will use facilities part-funded by SDF and 20 more have attended special courses run by BTCV.

Urban and rural links

One indicator agreed with SDF teams is the degree to which new links have been forged between urban and rural communities. This criterion is difficult to quantify but is important in terms of evaluation of the wider benefits of SDF, particularly in respect of social equity and inclusion. It also relates to the historic function of National Parks identified in the 1949 Act, specifically the provision of recreational opportunity for urban populations. Today this is recognised as one aspect of a much wider rural-urban settlement.

CEPAR's analysis (figure 9, below) indicates that all but 12% of projects (and most project expenditure) have been located within Park boundaries. 17 projects (6%) have a wider, regional focus. The spend on 12 (4%) projects is taking place in urban areas outside Park boundaries but only 4 projects (1%) have urban-rural links as a specific focus of activity.

By contrast however Park returns claim some 112 new urban-rural links. These range from 35 in the Peak District to 6 in the Broads ^[1, 7, 10, 11, 280, 282], which have introduced (mainly young) people from urban areas (Norwich, Lowestoft, Great Yarmouth and elsewhere in the UK) to the Broads.

Figure 9. Distribution of projects by location of expenditure

There is a problem however defining exactly what is meant by a 'link'. This needs to go beyond a general intention to encourage, or provide appropriately for the needs of, urban visitors; it implies a specific relationship involving distinct urban user groups.

Overall some 281 (93%) of projects scored in at least one of the above categories of economic, human or social capital.

e) Park purposes

Three specific criteria in the SDF Prospectus require SDF projects to further National Park purposes, to be complementary to key local and national strategies, and not to breach state aid rules.

Furtherance of National Park purposes has been generally interpreted 'weakly' as a lack of conflict with such purposes and enhancement of at least one of them. 'Purposes' has been deemed by most NPAs to include to the duty (sometimes referred to as a 'third purpose') to seek to foster the social and economic well being of local communities within the park, as well as to the two statutory purposes: the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage, and the promotion of opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the Parks by the public.

The question of whether SDF monies may be awarded to the NPA itself has also been an issue of some debate within SDF teams. Some NPAs (e.g. Exmoor whose solicitors were asked to prepare a note to this effect) are of the clear opinion that the NPA may properly apply for SDF monies to fulfil its statutory obligations, provided that its bids are considered on equal footing with those of other applicants. By contrast others (e.g. Lake District) have a very clear policy *not* to consider internal applications for funding, on the grounds that all NPA activities should be sustainable without the 'incentive' of external funding. Only 4% of all SDF grants have been awarded directly to NPA itself. In our opinion this is a matter which should continue to be monitored – we do not see any immediate need for any extension of the fund to be subject to a ruling either way. What is important is the principle that SDF should 'add value' to existing activities in the Park and that it should not be seen primarily as a vehicle for securing the implementation of NPA policies.

Very few funding applications were rejected because of conflicts with Park aims or objectives. None of those projects accepted run, in our opinion, contrary to them; the

majority have very clearly furthered them. However there is a distinction to be made between the statutory purposes of an NPA and its policy objectives (for example as defined in the Park Management Plan). It is important to emphasise that the requirement in the SDF prospectus that projects should further Park purposes needs to be interpreted in the most general sense if two potential problems are to be avoided;

First, it has been pointed out that some forms of sustainable innovation (for example renewable energy generation or 'green' building design) may at some point in their development, conflict with planning guidance. It is important that potential downstream landscape constraints should not inhibit innovation.

Second, there is the danger that 'Park purposes' become identified with the specific objectives of Park management. The result of this could be that projects supported through SDF might be tested against these institutional objectives and/or be used as a substitute for action and expenditure that is properly the role of the NPA itself. As stated earlier different NPAs have different policies on this matter. However our evaluation has found no evidence of this (and, as indicated above, 'self funding' has consumed a relatively small proportion of the SDF budget overall).

One direct object of SDF is the creation of partnerships between the NPA and other bodies in delivering sustainability objectives. SDF teams were also asked to indicate the extent to which new partnerships have been created because of the Fund, or been supported by it. Park returns estimate that 415 new partnerships have been created because of the Fund. The authority with lowest estimate (the Broads) reports just 3 new partnerships as the basis for 3 distinct projects ^[26, 27, 289]. It points out that it already has very close links with Park residents and businesses, most of whom will already be known to the Authority. By contrast, the Peak District NPA estimates that 161 new partnerships have been created as a consequence of its 58 projects. The vague meaning of 'partnerships' and fluid nature of many of them belies the apparent objectivity of the indicator.

Complementary to key local and national strategies (e.g. Local Agenda 21) has been cited in only a minority of applications.

No case has arisen of any apparent or potential breach of state aid rules.

f) Generating awareness of sustainability.

The SDF Prospectus encourages NPAs to learn from the experience of delivering the Fund and to promote the results to a wider rural audience. The March 2003 Briefing Note asks SDF teams to state, in their own Park level reports, how many and what kind of training/awareness raising sessions have been held on sustainability and the Fund, to state who attended and to estimate what multiplier effects resulted. It asks them to specify how much and what kind of publicity has been given to the promotion of sustainability and to the Fund. It asks them to state whether greater awareness of the principles and practice of sustainable development has been generated by the Fund both with those directly involved with its operation and within the local and wider communities.

Detailed information is not available to the present report. Activity in these areas should increase in the period 2004 –5. So far, all NPAs have produced printed materials promulgating SDF (and the nature of and need for sustainability). In six Parks this information is available by internet. In their preliminary returns to the first of the above questions all NPAs report having run training/ awareness sessions. The Broads SD Officer reports; *"An in-house SDF training/awareness seminar was held in March 2003 but as a statistic this is non-representative. Every conversation that the BA SDF Administrator has with enquirers/prospective applicants is 'awareness' raising and the same is true of the 12 BA staff who attended the seminar, each of whom has wider daily contact with members of the Broads community and the general public. Information about SD and the BA Fund is also promulgated via special pages on the BA website, SDF-related BA press releases and media coverage of the Fund and its projects"*. By contrast Yorkshire Dales reports 313

individual events including “*community workshops, school waste reduction activities, marketing events, conservation, composting, radio training, energy roadshows, community consultations, farm conservation training, sustainable building techniques workshop, green walks leadership training*”. What seems clear is that all NPAs have worked well to secure coverage of SDF projects and of the objectives of the fund in local media, amongst local communities, and within the Park authority itself. SDF featured prominently in the English National Parks Joint Annual Report for 2002-3¹² and has been promoted widely by individual NPAs both in their own official policy documents and in reports of individual projects in the local media.

However these are measures of output (or activity), not outcome measures. Teaching does not equal learning. The most important outcome of SDF – awareness of the principles and practice of sustainable development – is also the most difficult to measure and within the limits of this monitoring can only be estimated qualitatively. What is clear is that sustainability presents a radical challenge to existing economic and social relationships. It would therefore be inappropriate for SDF to act in such a way as merely to reinforce existing norms and values.

¹² National Parks of England. 2003. *Annual Review 2002-3*. Cardiff: English National Park Authorities/ Association of National Park Authorities.

5) Best practice

One of the requirements of the monitoring brief is to report on the lessons of SDF for ‘best practice’ in delivering sustainability at grass roots level. We argue below that truly sustainable projects should enhance the protection of the natural and cultural environment and at the same time should contribute to the social and economic well being of local communities.

‘Strongly sustainable’ projects should in addition continue (or show benefits) beyond the lifetime of SDF funding, or provide models for similar activities elsewhere, or prove a significant learning process for individuals, communities and organisations affected.

This section assesses the degree to which SDF has done this using all three sources of information, namely indicator data submitted by SDF teams, CEPAR’s own evaluation of SDF project returns, and observations made during our Park visits.

a) Robustness and risk; Additionality, extension and replication.

i) Additionality

Innovation and additionality are key criteria of SDF. Project evaluation returns from several NPAs indicate that the lack of additionality (‘could happen without SDF’) is a criterion for rejection of applications for funding in all Parks.

In their returns to CEPAR, SDF teams were asked to make a judgement regarding how many of the projects would not have occurred, or would have occurred on a smaller scale, in the absence of SDF funding. Overall, returns indicate that some 239 projects (77% of the total) were judged unlikely to have taken place, or would have taken place in a significantly diminished form, in the absence of SDF. The proportion of projects scored on this criterion is similar between Parks.

ii) Benefits beyond SDF funding

SDF teams were also asked to make judgements regarding which projects are likely to continue beyond the funding provided by the Fund, and in what form. Returns to this indicator indicate SDF officers’ expectation that 215 projects (69% of the total) would be likely to ‘live’ independently of SDF.

This was also a criterion in CEPAR’s own independent scoring of 216 projects (72%) as being likely to continue beyond the lifetime of SDF funding. However this figure was inflated by the inclusion of capital (e.g. equipment purchase, building and renovation) projects that by definition last beyond the date of completion. If these categories are excluded then the proportion of such projects that score on this criterion falls significantly.

Interestingly individual Park estimates under this criterion vary significantly from under 25% to almost 85%. There has been a good deal of discussion on the validity of the criterion (although little agreement as to how it might be measured). One view has been that if SDF is truly innovative, some projects (including feasibility studies) should be expected to have negative outcomes, which could not be foreseen at their start. Another question is whether sustainability requires sustained funding. It is likely that some projects just need kick starting in the marketplace. Others may always need core funding or other support from public or other external funds.

A related issue is the degree to which pilot projects lead to action. SDF teams have been asked to make judgements on their projects in this respect but this too is a matter which requires longer-term monitoring. The degree to which SDF should be used to support projects such as research, consultancy, and feasibility studies which have primarily a paper output (one-third of all projects to date) has also been the subject of some discussion within

and between SDF teams. One view stresses the importance of positive outcomes, i.e. that there should be a real prospect of downstream implementation independently of SDF or other public funding. An alternative view emphasises that research/ pilot projects are of their nature capable of negative as well as positive outcomes (and that a negative feasibility study can itself save wasted effort and resources) and argues that a proportion of unsuccessful projects should not only be tolerated, but should be expected if the fund can claim to be truly innovative. In all cases, funding is a matter of judgement; SDF Officers and selection panels need to balance the perceived likelihood of success against originality.

iii) Replication elsewhere

SDF teams were asked to assess which and how many of their projects provide models applicable to other areas within and/or beyond the National Park. Overall Park returns indicate that 179 projects (58% of the total) were felt to meet this criterion. Replicability depends on how it is defined however. CEPAR's own analysis rated only 119 projects (39% of the total) as providing a model for significant replication elsewhere (inside or outside the national park). However projects were scored on this criterion only if the replication was non-trivial, i.e. that the downstream developments would not happen in the absence of the SDF project. For this reason most building and capital works (and other) projects were excluded unless they provided some special features (for example 'green' design) from which others could learn. When these are included, the proportion of projects meeting this criterion rises significantly.

iv) Social Learning and social action

SDF teams were also asked to estimate (in their own annual reports) how innovative are the projects supported by the Fund, and to describe the way in which the Fund has been able to support such innovation. No indicator was specified in the July 2003 framework so only informal feedback has been received on this criterion.

In our own analysis, CEPAR has attempted to address the letter (as well as the spirit) of the SDF prospectus, that projects should "*change the attitude and behaviour of individuals and communities*". This proved the most difficult to apply (and is also potentially the most contentious). Every project could be said in some way to involve learning or experience on the part of those who participate in it. The criterion was therefore interpreted in its most restrictive (but still subjective) sense as presenting a challenge (involving re-examination or change) to assumptions, attitude and behaviour on the part either of those who participated in the project or on the part of those affected by it. Only 13 projects (4% of the total) were felt to be fundamentally innovative in a way that challenged existing understandings and assumptions. Innovation is an absolute criterion of the SDF prospectus but its estimation will necessarily involve individual value judgements to distinguish between projects that break new ground and those that merely extend existing good practice. Project applicants (and many participants) are already likely to share the knowledge, values and assumptions embodied in their projects. In many cases it is the dissemination of the results of such activities that is critical, and this is not something on which a judgement can be made at this stage in the SDF pilot.

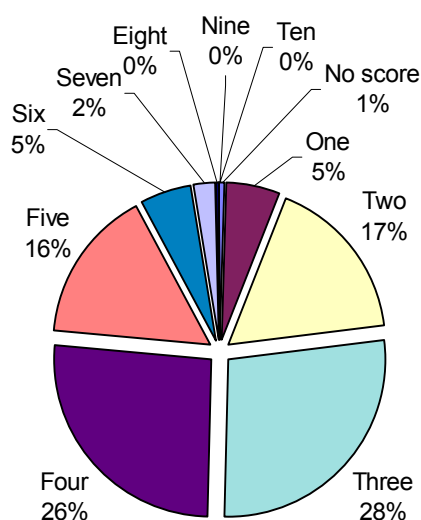
a) Contribution of SDF projects to sustainability

The outcome of CEPAR's evaluation of project returns (in terms of the degree to which SDF is delivering on different aspects of sustainability) is reported above under individual criteria in figure 8 above. It could be argued that individual projects should each satisfy more than one requirement of sustainability. In figure 10 below, the aggregate data is considered in terms of how many of the criteria in table 2 are fulfilled by each SDF project.

It should be emphasised again that the scoring is subjective, and that no attempt has been made to quantify the level of achievement within particular criteria, or to distinguish between

those which (for example) might score highly within one or two criteria only and those which rate on more criteria but where the overall contribution to each, is less. Nevertheless, the exercise provides some measure at least of the breadth of individual projects supported by SDF.

Figure 10. Frequency of projects satisfying between 0 – 10 sustainability criteria



Overall, 145 projects (50% of the total) were judged to satisfy four or more of the criteria. 225 (77% of the total) satisfy three or more 274 (95%) score on two or more criteria. 18 projects (6%) satisfied only one (or none) of the criteria.

b) 'Weak' and 'strong' sustainability

A rather different picture emerges if the data are analysed in a rather different way, by amalgamating the criteria into just three categories¹³, as follows:

- i. **Natural and cultural capital.** The first three criteria (natural and cultural capital, related to resource protection and the 'special qualities' of the national park) are of a similar order; few projects scored in more than one of these and would arguably not be expected to do so. However it could be argued that all projects should rate in some way under one of these criteria, which collectively could be said to contribute to the 'first purpose' of national park management.
- ii. **Economic, human and social capital.** These three categories (of which social capital has been divided into community participation/ public involvement, and social inclusion/ equality of opportunity, for the reasons indicated above) are again of a similar order and it could be argued that to be truly sustainable, a project should contribute to at least one of these.
- iii. **Robustness, risk and social learning.** Finally, it could be argued that to be sustainable, a project should not simply be a 'one-off', but that it should show at least some likelihood of continuation in time (beyond the lifetime of SDF funding) and/or

¹³ Note that these are not the same as the often-cited 'three legs' (environmental, economic and social) of sustainability. 'Social and economic well being' are treated here as a single factor equivalent in importance to protection of the natural and cultural resource. The 'third leg' – robustness, risk and social learning is a key element of the spirit of SDF.

replication elsewhere (inside of outside the Park) and/or that it should have led to a significant chance of understanding, attitude or behaviour on the part of those affected.

If the first two categories are considered it can be seen from table 7 that whilst almost half of all projects scored in terms of significant protection of the natural or cultural resource, and more than 90% contributed significantly to the local economy or community, only some 40% of projects did both.

Table 7. Frequency of projects scoring on one, two or three sustainability ‘legs’

		Economic, human or social capital		
		Y	N	Total
Natural and cultural capital	Y	118 (40.4%)	12 (4.1%)	130 (44.5%)
	N	160 (54.8%)	2 (0.7%)	162 (55.5%)
	Total	278 (95.2%)	14 (4.8%)	292 ¹⁴ (100%)

It could further be argued that ‘sustainable development’ should contribute not just in two areas (i.e. both to resource protection (natural or cultural capital) and to economic and social well being (economic, human, and social capital)) but that it should also count in the third. That is, that it should at the same time be sustainable in time and/or replicable in space and/or lead to significant social learning. If the third category is factored in, i.e. to exclude projects that do not rate on a criterion in this category, then the number of projects is only slightly reduced from 118 to 100 projects (or from 40% to 34% of the total). In other words, one third of all projects, judged by their objectives and content, could be said to be ‘strongly’ sustainable.

Any debate about the significance of these figures depends on the reliance placed upon the criteria that have been used, and their application in rating individual projects. The extent to which this is the case will be an important issue in the context of the increased emphasis (as manifest, for example, in the July 2002 National Parks Review) on protected areas as test-beds for innovations in sustainability in the wider countryside.

¹⁴ 10 ‘failed’ projects were excluded from this analysis

6) Conclusions and recommendations

At the time of writing, Defra has just announced its grant settlement for English NPAs for 2004-5 including a further year's allocation for SDF at the level of 2003-4, i.e. £200,000 per NPA.

This section therefore considers the future of the fund beyond March 2005.

However, SDF has been in existence for only eighteen months, and as emphasised in the discussion above, many projects are still ongoing and for most of those for which SDF funding is formally concluded, it is too early to make any robust conclusions about their long-term outcomes. Moreover the fact that this evaluation report has had to be submitted to the same timescale as individual NPA reports means that we have not had the benefit of NPAs' own Park-level monitoring in this report.

We also therefore make recommendations below with regard to the continuation of SDF monitoring from March 2004, and the need to communicate what has been learnt from SDF so far.

a) Extension of SDF beyond March 2005

An overall verdict on the success of SDF depends on what is expected of it. If seen primarily as a small but flexible pot for 'soft funding' rural enterprise and community projects, overcoming the financial restriction on NPA duty with respect to the social and economic well being of local communities then it has undoubtedly proved its worth. All projects have been in conformity with Park purposes; the majority have in some way furthered them.

However the letter of SDF prospectus is more ambitious than this; the aspiration is for SDF, to *"develop and test new ways of achieving a more sustainable way of living"* in ways that *"change the attitude and behaviour of individuals and communities"*. In this respect, SDF can also claim success, not merely in terms of the sum of what individual projects have achieved on the ground, but in placing the issue of practical action to secure sustainability firmly on the policy agenda within national parks in a way that requires 'bottom up' initiatives to complement 'top down' policies.

SDF has already proved itself a significant learning experience for Park communities and for NPAs. This is in keeping with the role of protected landscapes as 'test beds' for environmental and social innovations that may subsequently extend to the wider countryside. Sustainability is an idea, not a recipe, and raises questions to which there are no universal or immediate answers. SDF has amply proved its worth, not just for the immediate benefits that projects have brought to their participants and local communities, but in identifying possibilities for delivering on the fundamentals of sustainability which may subsequently be developed elsewhere.

Recommendation 1.

SDF should be continued within English Parks beyond March 2005.

However it is important that grantholders – and SDF teams – are able to plan in advance and funding uncertainties in this initial launch of SDF has not helped this.

Recommendation 2.

From April 2004, funding for SDF should be on a three-year rolling basis.

To initiate this rolling programme an announcement needs to be made early in 2004-05 year confirming that a three year rolling approach will be adopted, and that funding can now be confirmed to March 2006. This would address the significant difficulties resulting from late announcement of funding extension.

Recommendation 3.

The existing level of funding per protected landscape is appropriate and should be retained at its present level, i.e. £1.6m p.a. between the eight English Parks.

b) Extension of SDF beyond National Parks

One of the underlying precepts behind the introduction of SDF was the notion of national parks as 'test beds' for innovation in the wider countryside. The success of SDF to date suggests that the experiment could usefully be extended. Since the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, AONBs have been considered to be of equivalent quality and status to National Parks, but with different administrative arrangements. AONBs cover a larger proportion of the countryside than National Parks have a much larger aggregate population within their boundaries; and are visited by a great many more people. Following the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CroW), Conservation Board AONBs now have similar purposes to National Parks (although Boards themselves do not have development planning responsibilities). In non Conservation Board AONBs, there remains only one primary objective of conserving 'natural beauty'. However the new duty on local authorities to produce AONB management plans consistent with other statutory duties (including the production of community strategies) offers new opportunities for sustainability initiatives linking resource protection to social and economic well being. The availability of funding (which in some cases might be matched by contributions from local authorities) could help to stimulate activity in this area.

Extension of SDF to even a selection of AONBs would enhance their status at a critical time in their history.

Recommendation 4.

If there is any possibility of securing additional funding, consideration should be given to the extension of SDF to English Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), particularly in light of their higher profile subsequent to CRoW. Not all AONB are equipped to manage SDF however, and arguably some are too small for this to be appropriate. Three options should be reviewed, by which an enhanced Fund might:

- **be available in principle to all AONBs¹⁵ through a 'bidding' process to (or formula allocation from) a central pot, or via earmarked allocation to Regional Development Agencies.**
- **be extended to Conservation Board AONBs only (i.e. Sussex Downs, Cotswolds and Chilterns).**
- **be piloted in one or more area-based schemes involving collaboration between AONBs, or between National Parks and AONBs.**

Each of the three possibilities above has advantages and disadvantages and each involves funding and delivery issues that require further discussion. The experience to date of SDF delivery within National Parks is not directly transferable to AONBs, if only because AONB funding mechanisms are so different from those of National Parks (and likely to remain so, although the detail will depend on decisions to be made in the light of the Haskins report).

There are comparable funding streams to SDF already in existence within some AONBs, however these do not provide a model. The three AONBs in receipt of the Welsh Environment and Development Fund (EDF) show less variation than English AONBs, and they are funded differently. Moreover the ENTEC report does not deal with AONBs in detail

¹⁵ This would involve an extension of coverage of the English countryside from approximately 10% to over 25% of the land surface.

because Foot and Mouth Disease meant it was only possible to evaluate the NP experience which started a year earlier.

One English AONB (Lincolnshire Wolds) has already established a small grant scheme. The Wolds Landscape Grant Scheme was made possible through a £70,000 allocation from the East Midlands RDA and is very similar to SDF. It is available throughout the Wolds Natural Area, not just the AONB, and is intended *'to fund almost any type of work, provided an environmental and an economic benefit can be demonstrated'*¹⁶. The example may encourage a similar recognition from other RDAs of the potential of protected landscapes in delivering environmental and social objectives. Moreover if the initiative is deemed successful, it is uncertain whether any spread of such funding will be forthcoming at least in the short term and in any even way across the country. If it proved possible to make some kind of central funding available to AONBs this might encourage RDAs to provide match funding. However it seems unlikely that all of the smaller AONBs would presently wish to have access to SDF or that they would be in a position to implement it effectively.

In any extension of SDF some differential funding is likely to be appropriate between national parks and AONBs. Assuming an average of £50,000 per AONB this would imply an increase in the annual cost of SDF from £1.6m to some £3.6m for the first model above.

In general the level of funding needs to be related to the specific circumstances of protected area. One approach might be based on annual bidding by AONBs to a central fund, based upon demonstrated need. This would need to be closely evaluated and would provide an interesting comparison to funding mechanisms currently in place for national park SDF. Alternatively, funding could be related to the existing AONB funding formula including and incorporating land area, population size, need (e.g. state of economy or degree of social exclusion) and the capacity to deliver.

Extension of SDF to Conservation Board AONBs would initially involve only 2 or 3 AONBs and thus involve only a modest increase in the present level of funding. However it would be only a limited development of SDF, and it could be seen as a divisive one, introducing a further funding differential between AONBs with and without Conservation Boards.

On balance the most advantageous extension of SDF could be by means of 2 or 3 area-based schemes. This could be achieved at an additional cost of £1.2m (for three area pilots). In AONBs the local authority bears the statutory responsibility for landscape functions. Delivery of AONB SDF grant by JACs would raise their profile, and would assist integration in AONBs that cross local authority boundaries.

c) Collaboration between protected landscapes

Irrespective of what decision is taken on extension of SDF to AONBs, there is a strong argument for collaboration on a regional basis, or between sub-regional groupings of protected landscapes. The basis for both already exists.

There is already good collaboration among SDF teams in different NPs. Already some SDF projects operate across more than one NPA and/or have informed projects developed elsewhere. North York Moors NPA is already working closely with Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust on a joint funding bid to the RDA (Yorkshire Forward).

Good collaboration also exists between NPAs and nearby AONBs. One Exmoor SDF project^[299] is co-funded by Quantock Hills AONB. Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust has itself been approached by Nidderdale AONB to see if the Trust's operations could be expanded or replicated across both areas. In the South West Region, the South West Protected Landscapes Forum is already functioning as a coordinating body (served by a full-time Regional Coordinator) for the fourteen protected landscapes in the region (in particular the 12 AONBs), which together cover some 38% of the land surface.

¹⁶ <http://lincswolds.org.uk/grants.htm> accessed 12 Jan 2004

Recommendation 5.

Collaboration between protected landscapes in SDF delivery should be encouraged particularly in regions where they form an important element of the landscape¹⁷ and/or collaboration is already good¹⁸ or where protected landscapes are contiguous¹⁹.

This would facilitate coordination of policy, links with Regional Strategies, and targeted implementation and monitoring.

d) Delivery

Overall, the success of SDF in these areas depends on the way in which it is implemented and in particular on the dynamism, commitment and ability of individuals, not least of the SD Officer and SDF panels. The initial tension between their role as gatekeepers 'screening' applications and as environmental and social entrepreneurs whose role is actively to encourage and nurture truly worthwhile projects has itself proved a learning process and one that remains to be developed.

It is clear that where a longstanding and or well-known fund (such as the Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust) has been used as the vehicle for SDF delivery, it has been easier for SDF to get off the ground. However there is no evidence that this has affected either way the variety and strength of project applications.

Recommendation 6.

The broad principles of existing delivery arrangements should be retained, in particular project selection and local monitoring by an independent panel which also takes an active role in their implementation and a degree of responsibility for and 'ownership' of projects and their outcomes. NPAs should continue to reserve the right to 'call in' applications and projects in certain circumstances, but should remain at arms length from day-to-day operation of the fund.

The SDF panel can include representatives of local and regional community, business, environmental, wildlife, agriculture, tourism and recreational interests, but should be small and the main requirement is that its members can think laterally and promote innovation. The panel is required to develop working methods that allow a speedy response to requests for grants, and to place a high level of trust in the ability of applicants to carry forward proposed projects.

Recommendation 7.

The role of NPAs and SDF panels in encouraging appropriate projects, promulgating best practice and disseminating the results needs to be emphasised. SDF teams need encouragement – and time – to develop their role as enablers and facilitators of sustainability. NPA members could in some parks take a more proactive role in encouraging appropriate projects.

Recommendation 8.

The NPA should continue to provide the secretariat for the panel, through the employment of a dedicated SDF Officer. Park level overheads (costs of administration and delivery, including SDF Officer salary) could be allowed to rise from the present 10% to 15% of the fund, provided this results in increased capacity of the team to deliver higher quality (and more small) projects and to

¹⁷ e.g. the SE where 9 AONBs and 2 possible National Parks comprise some 25% of the land surface

¹⁸ as in the SW where 12 AONBs and 2 National Parks occupy some 38% of the land surface

¹⁹ for example Yorkshire Dales NP with N Pennines, Nidderdale and Forest of Bowland AONBs, which together straddle 3 English Regions

promulgate the outcomes of individual projects and the lessons of the Fund overall.

One immediate issue concerns the distribution of projects and funds between large and small grants. Given the expectation in the SDF Prospectus that “a high proportion of grants will be relatively small in order to assist a large number of groups”, the low representation of small grants in SDF allocations to date may be an issue.

Recommendation 9.

In future administration and monitoring of SDF the distinction between large and small projects should be around the £5,000 (rather than the present £1,000). The maximum sum could be raised to £50,000. Requirements for match funding, particularly in respect of larger grants, could be clarified.

Innovation and learning outcomes spread right across the spectrum of large and small grants, and some of the most exciting projects are the small ones. Conversely some concern exists about the larger projects particularly those that involve capital construction.

Recommendation 10.

Consideration should be given to requiring rather stricter project selection and outcome criteria for larger projects, including the requirement that the proposal should not in principle be fundable from any other public source.

Recommendation 11.

The principle that “A high level of trust must be placed in the ability of applicants to carry forwards proposed projects” should be retained.

A corollary of this principle is that ‘failure’ of particularly innovative projects (in the sense that anticipated outcomes do not materialise) should be accepted up to a certain proportion (say 1 in 4) of projects. But it is a corollary of this that there should be learning from failures as well as successes, placing an emphasis on monitoring and promotion.

Present financial monitoring arrangements, though differently implemented in each NPA, seem adequate. National monitoring should be maintained to ensure that the emphasis is on outcomes and innovation.

However some of the uncertainties over present delivery arrangements could usefully be clarified.

For example, there is some confusion however as to what counts as ‘match funding’. The expectation of contribution in kind such as volunteer time or loan of equipment or premises (particularly for funding applications of 100%) and the kind of projects that might be considered so eligible has been a matter of some discussion amongst SDF teams. In some NPAs the generation of revenue has been accepted as match funding, as has the volunteer time. In others, however, these have been treated as outputs and project applications based on match funding in this way have been rejected. This needs to be clarified. Most NPAs appear to have used standard local government cash values for volunteer time, however this was not specified in the SDF prospectus (as it was in the Welsh AONB guidance). This has allowed some latitude to SDF Officers as to how they value such inputs.

e) Objectives

The aims of SDF “*develop and test new ways of achieving a more sustainable way of living in the countryside*” by providing a flexible and non-bureaucratic means of funding projects which explore ways of pursuing the principle of sustainability and of breaking down barriers to sustainability; develop models for the sustainable management that can be applied more widely; generate greater awareness and understanding of sustainability; involve individuals, businesses, community groups and/or encourage participation of young people, and which promote social inclusion, remain appropriate and necessary goals.

Recommendation 12.

The present objectives of the fund are entirely appropriate. Criteria for project selection and for evaluation of project outcomes should remain broad and flexible to be adapted to local circumstances. However a greater emphasis needs to be placed on innovation (technical and social) and on the learning processes identified in the prospectus. Projects should challenge assumptions, understanding, attitudes and behaviour. More emphasis could be placed on rural – urban links and upon the involvement in SDF projects of under-represented groups.

SDF needs to continue to relate general principles and criteria to the specific needs of local environments and local communities. SDF is a challenge to individuals and communities to come up with truly innovative ideas. It is generally agreed that some of the early SDF projects approved were somewhat 'tame'; their quality has improved as news of the fund and awareness and understanding of its aims has spread. The diversity of attitudes and debate regarding the aims of sustainable development has proved a positive stimulus to learning and analysis.

Recommendation 13.

Innovation, flexibility and accessibility should continue to be the key features of SDF delivery; this would imply retaining the present low level of bureaucracy. For this reason SDF delivery should not be subject to the same criteria as applies (for example) to mainstream local authority expenditure.

The existence of SDF as a distinct funding pot, with the ability to take risks, and to be the first to commit, is of value in providing flexibility especially in small-scale grants. However while it is important to retain this feature of SDF as a distinct funding stream, its promotion alongside, and separate delivery from, other funding sources can prove confusing to potential applicants. The existence of 'one stop shops' (such as the Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust) offers certain advantages in providing a single source of expertise and information, which could be explored in other Parks.

Recommendation 14.

Links between SDF and other funding streams (such as Leader+); in areas where these are well developed should be further explored, as should the possibility of establishing single points of information and expertise.

The requirement that SDF should 'further National Park purposes' has proved a source of debate. It is not clear if the duty to seek to further the economic and social well being of local communities should be construed as a 'third purpose' or whether the technical innovation featured in several projects is not easily accommodated by them. They are also difficult to apply as the basis for project evaluation. It has also been suggested that these purposes (provided the 'third purpose' is included) are very close to definitions of sustainability and perhaps redundant, even a hindrance to the flexibility and 'learning process' that SDF embodies. AONB 'purposes' are limited to the conservation of natural beauty (wildlife and cultural heritage are not specifically included). Although a general need to promote where possible recreational opportunity and public awareness as well as to foster social and economic well being are often assumed, this is not a statutory purpose or duty except in the case of a Conservation Board AONB. Linking the aims of SDF to the statutory purposes of particular categories of protected landscape would therefore seem to be unnecessarily restricting.

Recommendation 15.

Any review of SDF objectives beyond March 2005 might remove the criterion of furtherance of national park (or AONB) 'purposes' in favour of some general objectives of sustainability. This would be a useful precursor to generalising the principles or availability of SDF to the wider countryside.

f) Monitoring

Monitoring and evaluation of SDF should continue to be 'light touch'. The strength of the Fund is that it is free of local authority Best Value and other bureaucratic procedures although it remains subject to the auditing process.

Recommendation 16.

Monitoring at Park level should best be done as at present by SDF teams themselves reporting to local SDF panels. This enhances the learning process and deepens understanding of sustainability and its articulation in practice. An Annual Report to Defra should be required from each Park, based upon a revised Framework for Monitoring and Evaluation (attached in draft as Appendix i. to this Report).

Monitoring and evaluation of the Fund's operation at national level should provide added value by seeing this not just as a way of ensuring procedural regularity, but as a crucial element in the process of exploring, evaluating and disseminating the meaning of sustainability. In addition, the experience to date of participative evaluation of projects and project outcomes by SDF teams has been highly effective as a mechanism for ensuring quality of delivery (and a degree of consistency in outcome and evaluation) and value for money. This should continue.

Recommendation 17.

The delivery and outcomes of SDF within NPAs should continue to be subject to the scrutiny of an independent body beyond March 2004. In particular review of programme outcomes and the quality and quantity of project applications needs to be monitored so that decisions can be made each year with respect to the three year rolling programme recommended above.

g) Communication and dissemination

Authorities involved in SDF delivery should be encouraged to (continue) to share experiences and - where practicable – work jointly. Peer review of projects is a particularly valuable way of sharing experience and developing insight. The existing national SDF officer workshops have proved hugely useful and could be extended to members of SDF panels. These meetings need to be carefully structured, and perhaps facilitated by an independent agency, to make the most of the time and resource invested in them.

Recommendation 18.

External monitoring should include a brief to facilitate information sharing and collaboration between SDF teams and NPAs in the delivery of the fund, the elaboration of objectives and the examination of outcomes.

The achievements and lessons of SDF should be more widely disseminated, at national level.

Recommendation 19.

Consideration should be given to the production, towards the end of 2004-2005, of an illustrated publication (also available on the Defra website) promoting the achievements and lessons of SDF in an attractive and accessible way.

Recommendation 20.

Wider debate about the aims and achievements of SDF would be valuable. Future activities could include two national dissemination events in 2004-5, one aimed at National Park (and other protected landscape) staffs, the other aimed at a wider audience of those concerned with sustainability issues.

Sustainability means more than 'joining the dots' in a pre-existing policy landscape determined 'from above'. It requires the commitment and enthusiasm of communities and businesses, and is brought to life by a multiplicity of individual initiatives, small and not so small, generated from below. These cannot be scripted or orchestrated. However they do need to be facilitated. In the first eighteen months of its English existence, SDF has shown itself an effective mechanism for doing just this.

Centre for European Protected Area Research

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Appendices

Appendix i. A framework for monitoring and evaluation

Appendix ii. List of SDF projects to March 2004 by grant value

Appendix iii. Case studies.

Other documents

Other documents related to this summary evaluation of SDF are as follows:

- Summary report
- Research Note
- SDF project descriptions 2002-2004